"CHICKIE"
A SEQUEL

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ELENORE MEHERIN

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A SEQUEL

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BY

ELENORE MEHERIN
Author of "CHICLIE"

GROSSET & DUNLAP
PUBLISHERS NEW YORK

Made in the United States of America

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	THE NEW LIFE	1
II	SPINNING THE WEB	5
III	ENTANGLEMENTS	10
IV	MARY'S LETTER	14
V	YOUTH'S RIGHT	17
VI	THE CLOSED DOORS	21
VII	THE LIP STICK	25
VIII	JAKE'S PLEA	30
IX	SERVICE	34
X	THE GOLDEN GIRL	38
XI	TRACKED	43
XII	ALBATROSS	47
XIII	THE BROKEN DREAM	51
XIV	PAYING THE PIPER	54
XV	THE BRANDING	60
XVI	OLD JULIE	64
XVII	OTHER HEARTS	70
XVIII	FLOTSAM	75
XIX	UPWARD OR DOWN?	79
XX	SACRIFICE	83
XXI	THE RETURN	88
XXII	THE GAMUT	92
XXIII	BURNING BRIDGES	96
XXIV	NEW BEGINNING	100

CHAPTER		PAGE
XXV	JAKE'S OFFER	105
XXVI	MEASURING UP	110
XXVII	THE DANCE	114
XXVIII	DR. DAVID	118
XXIX	THE GLASS HOUSE	123
XXX	RESOLUTION	128
XXXI	IDEALS	132
XXXII	TRIUMPH	137
XXXIII	JAKE SPEAKS	141
XXXIV	FAREWELL	145
XXXV	JEALOUS GODS	149
XXXVI	ACCUSATION	153
XXXVII	NEMESIS	158
XXXVIII	CHICKIE'S FIGHT	162
XXXIX	THE LOST FIGHT	167
XL	THE GIFT	172
XLI	THE VISITOR	176
XLII	THE PROMISE	180
XLIII	THE RECOMMENDATION	184
XLIV	JANINA'S WAY	188
XLV	BRAVING IT	193
XLVI	THE JUDGMENT	197
XLVII	REVENGE	201
XLVIII	NEW BONDS	205
XLIX	THE RIDE	209
L	A NOD FROM BARRY	213
LI	RUMOR	218
LII	THE WORD TO JAKE	222
LIII	THE DISMISSAL	227
LIV	CHICKIE'S STAND	231

CHAPTER		PAGE
LV	Two Men	236
LVI	The Great Call	241
LVII	Jake's Homecoming	246
LVIII	The Operation	251
LIX	Battle with Death	255
LX	The Forked Road	259
LXI	Farewell	263
LXII	Widening Vista	267
LXIII	Confession	271
LXIV	The Snub	276
LXV	Love	280
LXVI	The Right to Love	285
LXVII	The Dinner Invite	289
LXVIII	Vindication	295
LXIX	The Stronger Way	299
LXX	Fulfillment	304

"Chickie" a Sequel

CHAPTER I

THE NEW LIFE

She loved. Now she paid. With each beat of her pulse she paid. There was no end of it—for her or for them—those two that loved her so.

A while ago she had been glad; bright, flippant thing, her heart all song. A while ago, Jonathan watched her every move, his old eyes filled with adoration. He chuckled to the mother: "That Chickie of ours! An angel—that's what she is!" The mother always answered, tremulous: "Ah—God is good to us."

But now the wings were folded down; the music stilled in Chickie's thought. They must give her up—their dear and pretty one—send her into the waste she had made for herself; send her there alone.

Bitter thing to do—stand in the depot, this soft, April night; wait for the train that would take her from them—let her go . . . wave gayly. Oh—but their hearts cried out against it. She was theirs—theirs—and to-night she seemed so sweet; so tall and slim with the pale sadness at her mouth.

Jennie said: "You look quite pretty, Chickie dear."

Chickie stooped and fastened the leash to Wildie's neck. She patted her mother's hand and didn't try to speak because then queer little movements went about her lips, made them twist so.

Jennie said: "Why, the light is very strong." And wiped her eyes. She said that a dozen times. It was hard for her. She was so gentle; so bowed by Chickie's pain.

But Jonathan stood up, giant and proud, his arm on Chickie's shoulder. Ho, this was a lark for them, just a trip, nice little outing. He said: "Write now, Chickie girl, every day! Old ones get lonesome—remember!"

Said careless things like that and winked. But Chickie knew.

For in the night she had awakened. Jonathan was kneeling at her bed. It frightened her. She ran her hand across his grizzled head. He didn't move—never said a word. Finally he rose and kissed her long. His eyes were wet against her face.

Now he said: "We'll be jaunting down to see her week after next, eh, mother?"

Jennie smiled; tears rushed fresh to her eyes. She pulled at Chickie's hand; held it hard. For there came a whistling; a snorting of the train. Jonathan reached for the suitcases.

Jennie said: "Oh, now—you'll go? Going, Chickie dear?"

Chickie smiled bewildered, repeated: "Oh, now—" and swept her arms about her mother, clung to her and clung and in that moment would have given up her life to have them hold her; keep her with them.

Jennie's lips moved softly: "Going, Chickie dear? Oh—oh—" It was like sobbing.

Chickie said: "Mother, mother darling—there—oh, good-by—" and took the thin, soft hands, oh, gently, from her neck, pressed the young, sweet lips on Jennie's faded cheeks.

Still Jennie cried and wouldn't let her go. Then Chickie laughed and with a little gay move took her handkerchief, wiped Jennie's eyes. She said: "Mother, you love me? Oh, you do!"

And grabbing up the leash went stumbling after Jonathan.

Jonathan carried her bags, brushing the porters aside. He set them quietly at her place. He passed his hand over his face that was so gray, it hurt Chickie to look at it.

She lowered her head against him, pleading: "Ho, Jonathan, weakening?"

There went a trembling through him, the rugged chin doubled. But he raised her face in his hands—that way he always did. He said: "Ah, Chickie—Chickie girl—" and stooped down quick and kissed her . . . said again—"Chickie—my Chickie—pray God—pray God—"

She closed her eyes—heard him shuffle down the aisle. Alone—she was all alone now.

Suddenly she remembered that they would wait there until the train was gone and she got up in a panic, rushed to the platform. Another look—see them again.

They were there—straining their eyes. They saw her. Jennie cried out. Both of them waved—began to laugh. They

kept waving. Chickie blew kisses to them. Jennie took a little step toward her, called; the train began to move. Soon they grew smaller, faces blurred.

Still they waved—smaller—now dimmed—now gone—now swallowed in the dark.

Rails humming; rushing her away; from them; from all the old, familiar things—into the future.

And she was afraid—yet smiled above her hammering fears. Oh, brave—they said she must be brave—stand up quietly and battle. Jonathan asked that of her—only that. And there might come to her again a beauty—even a richness and a peace; even a healing of the wound that ached and ached within her heart.

Chickie didn't ask this. Oh, no! Ask nothing.

She stared now with blinded eyes into the dark; marked out the lights on the city's hills. She fancied Jonathan's hat still waved at her; fancied that Jennie wiped her eyes.

She peered into this night that dropped like a wall between her and them, closing her out from that happier time—oh, those thousand days when she had laughed so blithely.

Finished all that. She wanted it so. Finished all joy. Let her go in quietness with bowed head and lowered eyes, unnoticed, forgotten.

Tragic thing to ask of life when one is young—just twenty-two. But this was Chickie's prayer.

She lay in her berth that night wide awake. When tears crept from her eyes, she wiped them slowly. Again, when she wondered why she had been beaten so, why she had been branded so, she made her lips smile. Past—all that was past. She must wipe it out—all of it, begin again.

Oh, not so hard—going away. That made it easy—lose herself in a city of strangers. Finally she had decided on Los Angeles. No one knew her there. No one would stare and whisper when she passed.

She would work. She would make no friends. Only the dog. They would take long walks.

She turned her face against the pillow for suddenly Mary stood before her, then Janina, then Jimmy, his lips shaking: "You don't love me—isn't that the reason? But if you change—"

No—never wrong Jimmy like that and her heart all dead the way it was—

Jimmy passed. Now it was Jake who came and took her hands—kissed them in that kingly way of his—

Brave for them. . . . Oh, yes, she could be brave!

Such a thing as they had asked! Such a fight to put upon her—soft, trusting thing; soft, loving thing.

But she got off the train that sunny morning in the early spring. She raised her head proudly. She smiled seeing a girl like herself caught in her father's arms. But when a young man rushed through the crowd, swept bodily in his arms a girl with a baby and there, before every one, hugged the two of them, kissing them again and again—when Chickie saw that she turned away. She tugged at Wildie's leash and hurried.

Not so easy, perhaps—not always easy—

But she walked resolutely. She kept saying to herself, "Never mind—never mind—"

Late that afternoon Chickie found her new home; found the scene for the fresh, hard battle.

A quiet place—roomy and comfortable, an old white two-story house set in a neglected lawn. The windows from the side looked out on the mountains, serene magnificent Sierra Madres now veiled in sunset haze of the softest blue and copper.

"Yes—Wildie could stay here—Mrs. Janis loved a dog—there was a big yard." This was the determining fact.

Now Chickie sat in the large, bare room. There was a white iron bed, a white dresser, a neat, faded pink carpet on the floor. The high walls were covered with calendars, poster girls—but Chickie could take them all down. She could fix the room to suit herself.

She sat there and listened to other boarders going down to dinner; sat there and pictured Jonathan and Jennie all quiet—all lonely now. Her heart thumped heavily.

The old sweet ways of her girlhood were ended and with it the dream wherein life walked so nobly, garmented in silver.

She must find another path; another dream.

She must go on a new road; cruelest road that ever a young girl takes; the road back, a fight each inch of the journey and all the world against her.

But she knelt at the window that night and looked to these uplifted mountains. She clasped her hands against her breast; against the ache and awful loneliness. There was a prayer in her white, beautiful face. Let her not fail—oh, let her not go down again. She prayed that.

CHAPTER II

SPINNING THE WEB

WHITE azaleas, gleaming and chaste on a green bush—like a little garden flowering there in the corner of Chickie's bare room.

She touched the snowy petals. Her eyes misted reading the note, "Spring again, Helena, dear. Time for new blossoms. Send a line to an old dog, won't you? If you have trouble getting a job, wire me."

She wondered in what rich spring Jake found such kindness. She wondered, too, at the passionate devotion Janina showed. It was a little pitiful, for Janina wrote in one letter, "Chickie, old thing, I could cut out my tongue when I think, perhaps, that smarty alec things I've said may have influenced you. Did they? I wish you'd answer this truly."

Oh, it was nothing that Janina said; nothing that any one could say. Nor could their friendship heal her now.

She wrote to Jake, "You are too good to me. It makes me wish to cry. And I dare not do that, you know. I'll write soon—in a few weeks. You can not know how much I thank you."

A thousand blossoms there might come this spring. They were not for her. It was pathetic that she turned so resolutely from every glad and happy thing; that she said to herself so insistently, "No—let me be alone."

There was no love left in her heart. She had emptied it.

There was no laughter in her spirit. Kings might kneel to her. No chord of joy would ever again respond.

So Chickie felt—and faced a future, destitute of youth; of sparkle; faced it grimly, even proudly.

Those first nights in the new home she wrapped this quiet about her. She went down to the dining room, bowed to her neighbors; spoke to none. She was unaware of the stealthy glances accosting her; unaware that the white beauty of her face was an astonishment and a lure. It would always be.

Afterwards she took Wildie and walked swiftly through the

strange, new streets. This was an ancient part of town, with many rambling, dilapidated old homes set in wide gardens. There were hills about. Chickie walked to West Third, high above the Tunnel and here she found a hill even like that on Twenty-first Street.

She missed the bay and the lights going down from the ferry boats in such a golden radiance through the waters. But she soon came to love the changing colors of the dreaming mountains.

Spring sauntered with perfume and flowers over the southland that year; it brought fairy songs in its breeze.

Chickie sat on an old broken wall—brooding. To-morrow she was going to work. The typewriter company where she had registered phoned. The position was with a brokerage firm—the type of work Chickie understood.

Yet she had a reluctance to begin; an overmastering fear. And she sat on the hill, wishing frantically for some escape—oh, that the world might come to an end or a tidal wave sweep up—

Some one spoke to her. "Vista for dreams, isn't it, Miss Bryce?"

She turned sharply. It was a man who lived at the boarding-house, Edgar Manx, a pale, distinguished fellow about thirty-three. He had a pleasant voice with a deep English accent and a winning smile. Every night he took a cane and went for a brisk walk. Twice already he had saluted Chickie, eagerly.

Now he said, "May I sit here, too?" There was an ease in his manner. "You're a wanderer from far places, too, aren't you, Miss Bryce?"

"Oh, not so far." She glanced down quickly, clasping her hands.

"Pardon me. I confess to a great curiosity. I love these hills. Do you? They have all manner of legends about them. They say a young girl in the old Spanish days hid in these canyons with her lover. She was very beautiful and married to a leathery old sinner. He found them out. Both the girl and her lover were done to death. Sad, isn't it?"

"Ho—I can think of sadder things than that."

The Englishman laughed. "Now, can you?" He seemed amused and glanced with friendly admiration at her face. "What may your tragic knowledge be?"

Chickie laughed uneasily. "Oh, well—why, suppose the girl had to live on and on and only the lover died?"

"Yes, that would be worse. Only she was young and youth forgets." His eyes were sober now and fixed on her downcast face.

She said flippantly, "Tish! Why not?" and clapped her hands so that Wildie bounded to her side.

They walked home rather silent. The man's face was flushed.

After that she often found his eyes dwelling on her. He asked her to the theater—to musicales.

But no—she had her evenings planned—all of them. Ho—she could tell him things! Crueler far than death or love!

Her refusal of this friendship offered so eagerly became a symbol in Chickie's mind. She would go through life like this, drawing further and further from men—until finally she would grow used to the loneliness, the still monotony. She would be old; no one would care that once she was a radiant thing; once she had loved and had a little child and it was dead.

But the days passed; she did not grow used to it. When she went to work, it became an anguish and a terror. She began to dread the long evenings, the return to her silent room. Sometimes she would stand at the entrance to the tunnel, talking a long while to the bent old woman who sold papers.

Other times she watched the girls in the office, wondering piercingly if any of them knew life as she knew it; if any of them bore such a flaming wound.

When Daisy Brack, a tall, witty person who made up for her homely features by an exquisite cleanliness and a rather delightful impudence, caught her arm one afternoon with an impulsive, "Say you, Helen of Troy, don't be so uppish! I'm walking your way." When she was so friendly, like that, Chickie felt a melting, a gratitude that brought tears to her eyes.

There were ten girls in the office of Norp Willman. Six were young, and of these four openly cherished dreams of movie fame. There were the little Ordin sisters with their molasses hair bunched in curls—an obvious and sorry imitation of Mary Pickford. They talked mincingly with much pursing of their lips. But they were a harmless, good natured pair.

Then there was skinny Bobby Jones. Bobby could make faces and had an idea that if once her eyes and nose could get

themselves on the screen she would sit back the rest of her days and let the world laugh at her. She used to say that all the time before she was born her mother read the comics and as a result nature bestowed on her this little piece of patchwork for a face.

The acknowledged star of the office was Eloise Maxwell, a dark, snaky creature. Eloise favored the queenly rôles and appeared daily in some new copy of Barbara La Marr. She had already acted in several crowd scenes and was now in the habit of saying, "Well, as Dorothy Gish was telling me, you just have to keep trying." Or she sometimes waxed more familiar and confided, "I was talking to Doug Fairbanks the other night and he says—"

The scene of these conferences was the dressing room just as it had been when Janina reigned.

Chickie had been working about two weeks when the incident occurred that made a mockery of all her plans.

She returned from lunch a little early. The dressing room quivered with excitement. The Ordin sisters had their hair freshly marcelled; Eloise had rushed home and now appeared in a new summer dress of scarlet organdie; even Daisy Brack had a tense, vivid look. She gave Doris Ordin a push: "Step aside, little dimple, you haven't a chance! The boy likes them homely. I'm elected!"

Daisy sighed and made room for Chickie. "What's the use? The son and heir arrives to-day. Behold the pure sex girding for the battle."

Betty Ordin now began to giggle: "I hear he's to refuse the old man's coin."

An indignant, suppressed, "Who said so? The idea!"

Betty persisted: "I heard it on good authority. From some one who knows his sister. He's just dead set against the girls of his own crowd. Calls them all parasites and won't look at one of them. So you see!"

"Yes—and I heard that he's writing a book about money being a poison. And he's saying horrid things in it about women of to-day and they're going to the devil. The poor nut!"

"Then get away from that mirror, will you!"

All afternoon, eyes moved with stealthy anticipation to the door. Each time it opened, the air sharpened with quickly drawn breaths.

At 4 o'clock Lee Willman entered. He seemed to flash through the outer office—a thin, tall form, moving rapidly with restless, half contemptuous looks about him.

He came to his father's desk. It chanced that Chickie was taking dictation. She didn't raise her eyes. She heard a deep-toned voice: "I'll wait—finish it."

He stood there. Presently Chickie felt him watching her; felt his glance like a heat on her face. She grew nervous.

Then his eyes moved to her hands—back to her face. She felt stifled.

Norp Willman said: "That will do—"

As Chickie rose, Lee Willman picked up a pencil that fell to the floor. He offered it to her. She saw his face with its extraordinary lighted eyes—large, brown, deep-set under the broad, prominent forehead. She caught an impression of something wistful—overdelicate in his mouth. He smiled, revealing his excessive youth—but it was a magnetic smile, somewhat pathetic. Or it seemed so, to Chickie.

The father and son went into a little private office. Half an hour later the father left.

Then Lee Willman rang Chickie's phone. "Would you mind taking some dictation, Miss Bryce?"

CHAPTER III

ENTANGLEMENTS

"You're new here, Miss Bryce?"

"Yes."

"But your home is here?"

"It is now."

Lee Willman's eyes narrowed. "Oh, you're living alone?"

Chickie closed her notebook slowly. "Well, Mr. Willman, not exactly alone. I'm one of eleven not counting Wildie."

"Who's Wildie?"

"A dear friend of mine who differs from other friends by reason of two extra legs and no questions asked, ever." Chickie glanced up in time to see the flash of a smile and a faint color on the young man's face. She was surprised to find the old glib flippance coming so readily to her tongue.

"Indeed! Then your friend Wildie and I haven't much in common. So you're brought a dog along? And I suppose you're planning to go into the movies?"

"No."

"Well—don't! That's the curse of every pretty girl who comes to this town."

"All right, sir. I won't."

Lee Willman laughed—a short, infectious laugh. Almost immediately the brown eyes sobered. He said with a touch of vehemence. "Yet it's true, Miss Bryce. It's appalling. Well, don't stay to do the typing to-night. I'll be in to-morrow afternoon."

He rose when Chickie did. When she reached the door he said suddenly: "By the way, is this the first job you've had since you came here?"

"Yes."

"Do you like it? You're satisfied?"

"Yes."

He nodded, surveying her frankly. Chickie's eyes met his. He colored.

In the dressing room Eloise Maxwell, with the most studied grace, powdered her nose. In her imagination the world watched her slightest gesture. She said languidly: "You had quite a session with the son and heir. Rather good looking, isn't he? Did he ask you to dinner?"

"Oh, yes! And to a theater and gave me a raise and a week's vacation all by way of making himself agreeable."

Eloise shrugged: "He has asked girls to dinner right off the bat! In fact—that's the way he operates. It's right off the bat with him or not at all. He won't come into this office again for months. Too bad, kid—opportunity knocks but once. If he'd called me, the dear fellow would be paying for dinner at the Alexandria to-night!"

Lee Willman came to the office the next afternoon. He came four days in succession. Each time he sent for Chickie. There was an eagerness in his eyes. He interrupted his dictation to ask sudden questions, waiting with a kind of breathless anxiety for her answers. It disturbed her.

One day he kept her late. Every one else was gone. It was raining—a heavy, unexpected downpour. He sat at his desk, his back to her. She waited. Ten minutes—fifteen. Finally: "Have you finished, Mr. Willman?"

"No."

But he dictated nothing. After a long while, he got up, saying: "It will have to wait." He was very pale.

Chickie felt a vague excitement. She took a long time putting on her hat. Yet when she came into the corridor Willman waited.

"It's pouring, Miss Bryce. I'll drive you home."

She hesitated. "The car takes me very near."

"No, it doesn't. Look—" The rain swept in impetuous, silvery gusts across the pavement. "Great, isn't it? You'd get wet to the skin. Anyway, I'm driving out your way." He gave her a quick, boyish smile, opening the door of a sedan at the curb. "Now—where?"

"I thought you were driving my way."

"I certainly am. Might your way be to dinner with me to-night?"

"No, sir. My dates are distributed the first Monday of each month. By Tuesday morning there are none left."

"I don't believe it. You probably think it necessary to turn me down a few times."

Chickie laughed. "How very penetrating you are, Mr. Willman."

"Girls have such notions, I think a good many fine friendships are spoiled by all that bunk. Now, you're down here in this city alone. You must get lonesome. What do you find to do after office hours?"

The dark, lighted eyes went in frank curiosity over Chickie's face. He seemed very young and very eager. "I should think it a rather hard situation for a girl, especially a pretty one."

"You mean being alone? Why should it be harder for a girl than for a man? Do you have any difficulty spending your time?"

"Life is quite a different thing for a man."

"So I've heard. Why should it be?"

"It is. I think it terrible that girls wish to destroy this difference."

"Ho, Adam! You mean you like the present arrangement and don't want it changed? You think a man should do as he pleases, but a woman must do what is right. Is that it?"

"Well—whether it's fair or not, women have held up the torch for centuries. Why should they fling it down to-day?"

Chickie felt suddenly depressed. But she managed to say airily: "Oh, perhaps their arms have gone to sleep stretched up stiff so long. It's all real deep, Mr. Willman. I'll scratch a few dates and think it over."

"I'll come around and help you with your meditations." They had reached Figueroa Street where the boarding house was. They passed it.

Chickie said: "That's where I live."

"It seems to be standing very securely. You're not hungry. We might drive a little. Why did you come to Los Angeles, Miss Bryce?"

"To see the Sunny South, of course. And a rain storm in spring."

"Are your folks living?"

"Yes."

"I should think they'd want you with them."

"I'm only here for a while. You see I have a longing to travel; to get a glimpse at this and that. This is the only way I can do it—"

"Of course. You might as well see all you can. Have you driven out to Riverside yet? It's wonderful there with the

blossoms—a regular fairyland. We have a place there. You'll have to come out—"

They passed slowly through an old street with but a few dwellings. Lee Willman, glancing straight ahead into the rain that was gray now and swirling at the windows, said eagerly: "Sometimes you seem very sad to me, Miss Bryce."

"A woman of moods and mystery, sir!"

"How old are you?"

"Older than you."

"No—you aren't. Are you twenty?"

"Plus two."

"We're the same age, then. I've only known you a week—but it seems years."

"Perhaps you are given to quick friendships."

"I'm not given to friendships at all—that is, not with girls—" He became breathless and reaching over his hand suddenly pressed Chickie's. He said hoarsely: "You're very beautiful."

She was moved and answered, troubled. "Please don't say things like that."

"Why?"

"We can't be friends, if you do."

"We are going to be friends. Why shall I not say you are beautiful, since you are?"

She was silent. "Very well—say as you like. I won't hear."

CHAPTER IV

MARY'S LETTER

THAT night Chickie went to town, ate her dinner in a cafeteria. She could feel Willman's eyes; the quick pressure of his hand. She was weighted with foreboding.

She wanted no man to look at her; there was nothing in her that could be stirred.

If Lee Willman knew, he wouldn't be wishing that she might drive through the blossoms with him, this loveliest time of the year. Nor would he have said in that young, awed voice: "You're very beautiful."

As she went on with these thoughts she became oppressed and faint. She went walking down Broadway, where a balmy holiday lilt drifted in the air; long lines of men and women stood before the movie houses waiting for entrance, and girls in bright, summer dresses walked chummily as on Mission Street. Chickie glanced at them and then in the shop windows. She kept thinking: "I wonder what I shall do?"

Late that night she wrote to Janina:

"I wonder if I have a right to go on as I am. Is the past my own affair only? Or have others a right to know, that they may not offer me friendship unaware? Don't curl your lip, Janina, and say, 'Bunk—you're good enough for any one,' because others don't believe as you do. Others would not notice me; they might not even give me a job if I were to tell them. Am I a cheat because I conceal all these things?

"Sometimes I'm sorry I didn't stay home. But I don't think I could ever have borne it. It seems terrible that these things that are past won't be done with us. I don't feel a bit different than I used to long ago.

"Write soon, Janina. I love to see letters stuck in the rack on the wall. You'd laugh if you knew that I read them over and over. I have so much time alone."

The next afternoon Willman stood at her chair, glancing down at her face. "You are to come to Riverside with me on Saturday, Miss Bryce."

Chickie colored. "No, I have the day promised."

He frowned in annoyance, then said, abruptly, "Well, that's too bad. If you're not intending to stay here long you're missing a chance to see the country at its best. In a few weeks the flowers will thin. But you'll probably come south again—"

He spoke very casually. Chickie was relieved, yet surprised. For a week Lee Willman didn't come to the office.

She laughed a little sarcastically at herself. Why—imagining the man serious because he offered a kindness—offered it very carelessly. Perhaps he believed in throwing a bit of sunshine in a stranger's way. The other girls said he was queer.

She didn't need to worry. She wasn't so wonderful that men would block her path with their attentions. Why, she had worked four years already, and not so many had succumbed to her lures.

And then she was flirtatious enough and rather hungered for conquests. Now—a quiet, pale thing who didn't care to mark her lips with rouge any more—why—not much charm to her. She would be left as she wished—alone.

Evening after evening she walked down Spring Street to West Third, then through the tunnel and up the hills. She hurried if she thought there would be a letter, or she hurried and took Wildie for a run.

One night there was this from Mary:

"You don't speak of any friends that you have made. Do you spend all your time alone? You shouldn't, Chickie, no one can live so. Oh, why don't you come back here and be with us? But I suppose it's easy to talk. I think and think, and sometimes I want to shout out against everything. Then I wonder why in the world you are letting yourself be robbed of happiness and pleasure and everything that makes life worth while. What really did you do, Chickie, that was so awful? You loved and had a child. Well, so did I. I remember now what you said that awful day when you came here, and I was such a fool I didn't guess—that day you made up the story of Kathryn Armour. You said the world should let her have the child and make no fuss about it. I often think of the way

you cried then, and of all I might have done. Oh, it seems such a cruel shame.

"Chickie—do you know about Jimmy? He never talks any more about his own plans—except to mother, a little. But he's going away. At first it was hard but now mother says it's better so. He will take charge of that plant in Honolulu. We don't know if it is to be for always. Well—I'm just writing this, Chickie, because I felt you ought to know, and perhaps you don't hear from him, though you have his heart. You always did. Remember how he loved the points on your finger nails and made such fun of mine?

"Well—Chickie, don't think me a blundering fool but you are nearer than a sister to me and if you could—well—why don't you—why don't you go with Jimmy? Something sweet should come to you. Jimmy is that, Chickie. There is a greatness in him—truly.

"If this hurts, you must forgive it—but it seems that I or mother should say it. You are dear to us."

Mary's letter seemed a sacred thing. Chickie's eyes blinded reading it. Glorious Martha Blake! She would even be willing that Chickie should have Jimmy. And he was the idol of her noble life.

Thinking of this, Chickie could raise her head—she could feel a strengthening and an immense gratitude in her heart. Loneliness became easier to bear.

Suppose she did have to fight? Suppose she did have to meet with unpleasantness and struggle? Well—she would.

There were weeks—three or four—Lee Willman came in often. Chickie always took his dictation. He was sometimes restless, impatient. When he talked his eyes were always fastened on her face.

One afternoon, after she had left the office and was walking down the corridor of the building, he overtook her. He caught her hand, a boyish grin on his face. "Wait a moment, Miss Helena Bryce, I want to ask you something."

CHAPTER V

YOUTH'S RIGHT

"Why won't you ride with me, Miss Bryce?"

"I'd rather not."

"Yes—but I ask why. It's very baffling. Why are you so determined about this? Why won't you accept a mere courtesy?"

She decided quickly: "I think I'll tell you, Mr. Willman. I don't mind a dinner if it's a casual one. I shouldn't object to an occasional ride. But I honestly don't want the serious attentions of any man. I don't want men to tell me I'm beautiful—"

He stood before her, tall, full of nervous grace. He watched intently the movement of her lips. "Do you think you can stop them, Miss Bryce? But wait—I'll not mention beauty again. But I do want to talk to you. You won't mind that?"

"Well—now you understand exactly how I feel—"

"I don't understand it at all. A girl as young as you are—These things you refuse are exactly what other girls want. You can't go on like this—"

"But I'm going to, Mr. Willman. Being young, I've lots of time."

"Have you some great ambition, then, that makes sacrifice necessary? Are you some great dreamer, Miss Bryce? Or the apostle of a new religion?"

"No—I think not—"

"But if I accept all your terms, Miss Bryce; if I look on you merely as some lovely statue," the quick smile enlivened his face, "we can be friends, then?"

"Yes,—but you must know that I mean completely what I said."

"I will—I will—"

They reached the street. He took her arm, "Please, Miss Bryce, just a run out the road—a little dinner, anywhere. You said you didn't mind."

She hesitated, but he laughed, pulled open the door of his car—helped her in.

The middle of summer—they went flashing through roads all golden with sun, all splashed with flowers.

In spite of herself Chickie's heart leaped. Such radiant color, such roses, and the lilt in every breeze.

She was touched by the beauty and the wonder. She had suddenly a feeling that life was opening in a new glory—a sweetness. Even for her. She clasped her hands. Suddenly laughter rushed to her lips.

They went to dinner in a little Mexican restaurant that Willman said he had discovered. He ordered chicken with little tortillas and Spanish rice. It was delicate, yet very highly flavored.

He was in the highest spirits. "I've waited a long time for this moment, Helena Bryce. Tell me, is your mother a prophet?"

"Well, she's very gifted; I can't say that soothsaying is among her glories. Why?"

"I was wondering why she gave you the name of Helena. There, now, don't get alarmed. I haven't committed any crime yet. I was talking about your mother's gifts, not yours."

But he kept his eyes on her downcast face, her mouth so exquisitely chiseled, the youngness of the small pointed chin. Her beauty affected him so deeply he wished to speak of it. So sweet—so delicate seemed her face—and so quiet. This was its mystery for him, and its lure.

Quiet—why was she so quiet? Why was a girl so young, so full of piercing charm shutting out the world with this serene indifference? He wondered—and his ardor grew.

He said: "I'd love to see beneath."

"Beneath what?"

"You."

Chickie kept her eyes lowered. He went on: "You say you came down here because of a wish to see things, and yet you are not at all adventurous; not a bit eager for experience. I thought all young girls dreamed of love and heart-breaking as a necessary and thrilling part of the day's routine—why have you drawn up this most eccentric taboo? Are you a runaway nun or a medieval saint sent back to earth for penance and the torment of men?"

"That may be it, Mr. Willman! You know I've often

wondered why I'm here but I never thought of so fascinating a reason. Since I'm nothing much in the present incarnation why not point with pride to a romantic past?"

"No! The romance of the past is a dead thing compared to the living mystery of the future. I'd rather look forward with you, Helena, than backward. But merely by way of conversation, tell me, tell me, how many times have you been in love?"

Chickie flushed, but she said lightly enough: "As often as the just man falls, seven times daily, I believe, is the rule."

"Not that kind, Helena, I mean real love. What is your idea of that? Something very complete and sweeping that one can only experience once? Something very beautiful?"

"I've a friend," Chickie answered. "She says love is so glorious she would suffer any pain that life can bring for the joy of having known it. But I think love is the cruelest thing in the world if it owns one so."

"It shouldn't be cruel though, even though it does own one. It should be beautiful rather than cruel and one should be glad to be owned, shouldn't they?"

"Oh, no, it's a terrible thing to be owned by one's emotions."

His hand moved across the table to hers, pressed upon it. "You know?"

She was afraid he had seen into her mind. She laughed uneasily. Then she gave a soft impudent whistle, "Yes, I know!"

Afterward they drove out through Pasadena. Hills rolled and swept to the feet of the mother mountains, and these rose with an inspiring lift to a flame-touched sky.

Willman pointed—"My idea of love is like that—beauty and exaltation."

"But even the mountains are not always in this mood. Perhaps your ideal is one that can't be met. Every one wants love that is exalted and beautiful. Sometimes we think we have it. But in all the world how often is it found? Or how often does it last?"

"Why shouldn't it last? If one knows what he wants and waits until he finds it—why shouldn't he treasure the gift? Do you really believe that we begin to lose love from the very moment we find it in our hands?"

"Oh, I don't know. Love is so often only a mirage—so inspiring and wondrous from the distance. When we come up with it there is nothing."

"It could never be that way with you!"

He stopped the car. "Come up here, Helena—I want to show you the view from the hilltop."

They stood in the purple shadow of the mountains, all about them the hush, the deep still music of the summer night. From a thousand gardens came, dream-laden and wistful, the perfume of mignonette and roses.

Willman looked at her profile, white, delicate. He slipped his hand along her arm, clasped her palm.

"Let me—that's only friendship. You can give me a little grace. I wonder what you are wanting from life, Helena, that you keep your eyes so straight before you. Is it something very exquisite?"

Her breath hurried. "Oh—I don't know. Should we be so greedy, Mr. Willman?"

"Answer me, please. You must surely think of the future—of loving or of serving—"

"Yes—"

"I'm sure you do. What made you say that love is cruel? It needn't be."

"Perhaps I said it then, because I didn't know. You see, I don't want love—"

"Why don't you? You can never keep it from you—never. . . ."

"Yes—I'm going to—"

"No—you aren't—for you—"

She drew her hand free—shook her head. He went on: "With you it would be glory—"

His hands reached out—they touched light as flowers on her shoulder; suddenly they wrapped about her, nervous, ecstatic, —"Helena,—with you! With you!"

His lips fervent, murmuring, closed on hers.

She shut her eyes—her heart swelling with pain.

CHAPTER VI

THE CLOSED DOORS

At the door of the boarding house Willman's hand touched Chickie's. It was cold—very cold. This coldness went into her thoughts.

His face, white with emotion, remained before her. The rapt eyes pleaded. She wished to say, "No—don't look at me so—" They became more eager.

She felt older—years older—she was older than Lee Willman.

She felt the charm of his eager, restless youth; the passion of young ideals about him. It would be cruel if he should care for her— She said to herself: "I'll have to get a job somewhere else."

But no—it would make no difference—do no good to leave. Wherever she went it would be the same—shutting men away from her; turning her heart from warmth and friendship, walking on alone—always.

She looked down the bleak stretch of years—drank of their wasting bitterness.

She sat down at the old, scratched golden oak table. It had a tan linen cover; this cover was all knotty with the ancient daisies embroidered on it. Here, in a neat, redwood box, Chickie kept her letters. She fingered them now—the caustic, bold, contemptuous cheering that Janina was forever offering.

"So you think you should wear a label, do you? You think you should stand by the wayside, and shout, 'Unclean,' to save the dear, pure souls who might be contaminated by your friendship. What are you going to save them from? From life? From emotions?

"Hell's bells, girl,—don't pull that maudlin rot. I have no mind to drape myself in sackcloth and ashes. And I haven't the impudence of your sweet, good people who insult the Intelligence that brought us here. Don't they? They brand His method of keeping the little old world a-going infamous—

they call it 'sin.' They drag a trail of shameful thoughts across the clean, decent body of Nature— Well, I may join the Salvation Army yet and have my say.

"But if I were you, Chickie, I'd get both hands gripped hard on self-esteem. You know you can't hurt any one. You know there is no evil in you.

"You can only hurt a few shabby conventions. I think you have a right to go on as you are. For the love of heaven, don't get scrupulous and go shouting your own affairs to a world that is too sightless and too imbecile to understand."

Reading Janina's letter only heightened her agitation. It was all right for Janina to say this.

She thought numbly—"I should tell him—" Then she fancied his young face with those deep-set, lighted brown eyes—fancied the look that would dim them if she were to murmur that tortured past of hers. He thought her beautiful—love with her would be a glory—an exaltation—no—she couldn't tell him— Better to leave.

The next day he came to the office just as she was leaving. He reached her side with a quick, happy laugh: "We dined in Mexico last night. How about Italy this evening?"

"No—I have the evening taken."

"With yourself only, Helena?"

"Yes."

"Do you mean you are snubbing me? I didn't break my promise, did I?"

"Didn't you?"

"But you aren't angry with me?"

"No. But I'm sorry."

"Why? I know you mean what you say. Helena, is it only I that must give you promises? Or is it every man?" The smile grew uncertain on his lips. It was a plea.

She said, shrugging as though the matter were a trifle: "All men, kind sir—all of them."

His laugh rang out—deep, triumphant.

He said almost inaudibly: "I didn't promise it for life, did I?"

"Yes—you did."

"Oh, no."

"Then I will have to leave this place, Mr. Willman."

His cheeks grew pale. "Leave it? What can you mean?"

"Oh, nothing but that—I cannot have things happen like last night—I cannot—"

"Give me another chance, Helena. You can do this—you'll have to do this—"

"I don't know whether I should or not—"

"But you're going to."

She was sick with agitation—the right and the wrong of it. As though she could hurt him by the mere fact that she existed and her beauty lured him.

He idealized her. What violence might it do his young, ardent spirit if he learned this tragedy of hers? Why should she tell him? She didn't want his love.

But, walking home, a gnawing that was like a long, sharp tooth, tore at Chickie's mind. To be so young and to turn so grimly from the dear and trembling things of life—to feel that one must go mutely always—not even to laugh gleefully—not even to seize a friendly hand—to make a problem of an invitation to dinner—to turn like one old and spent from all the careless gayeties—she felt more than ever driven, more than ever alone.

So that when she came to the boarding house and found a machine before it, when some one tall, with his rich, handsome face all smiling, came toward her, she gave a little cry and reached out ardent hands.

"Jake!"

He pressed her hands in his own that were so warm and firm. He led her to the car. "Does my girl come to dinner with me?" Careless, like that, as though they had been meeting every day.

Oh, it was long since any one had looked at her with such a look.

More than she could bear. And all at once she trembled; could have cried—because of the wild rush of memory like floodgates opening on a flame of waters. As though she had been dead and now life came sweeping back and made her feel again, made her ache as much with pain as joy.

With his old gallant tenderness he helped her to the car; with his old kingly flash he led her to a French restaurant Chickie had heard the girls in the office praise. And here, too, glances followed the lofty shoulders, here, too, the eyes of women gleamed as Jake passed.

"First, Helena, my dear, are you glad to see me?"

She sat opposite him, white, tremulous, remembering the moment she had stood broken and silent in the wreck of all her life; that moment Jake had come, the black flashing eyes full of sorrow; the noble way he put his arms about her; and then stooping down to kiss and kiss her hands, to say it would come out all right; it must.

He reached across the table: "Helena—now listen—you have a long, long story to tell and I mean to hear every word of it. I didn't come too soon, did I?"

She shook her head.

"Then, tell me—what have you been doing? What do you do at nights? You are too white. I won't have that. Is your job a good one—"

"You talk, Jake—please. You saw Jonathan—do you think he misses me? I mean too much—"

"Well,—I suppose he does. You'd expect that."

"But he writes brisk things. Oh, in the last letter Jennie said that he walks around the house at night and she told me that sometimes he goes in and—" She couldn't go on—

"What—Helena?"

"Oh, he goes in and kneels where I used to sleep. Oh, that's awful. He came like that the night before I left. And Jennie says he's getting old—"

"Of course he is. Look at me with a few white hairs. I may do a little walking at night myself, Helena, my dear. Jonathan has weathered storms. And you won't stay from him, always—"

"Oh, that's the part—but I'll have to—I can't go back there. Oh, you know, Jake, I feel as though all the doors are closed. And they are, too. You don't know how strange it is to go about saying to yourself, 'Hush, hush, never mind.'"

Chickie kept her head down, made her lips smile. But a tear dropped to her hand.

Jake wiped it slowly, covered the spot with his palm. "Poor little darling—is this what you're doing? You mustn't. No, I can't let you do that."

CHAPTER VII

THE LIP STICK

"Why should you take it so?" Jake's hand moved slowly over hers.

"Do you think I pity myself, Jake? No, I don't—oh, really."

"Why should you say all doors are closed, Chickie? This is a big, fine world. I told you this long ago. Because you make an unhappy twist and come against a blank wall, do you mean to tell me you must stare at it forever? Do you mean to say you can't turn about and try another path?"

All the while Jake's eyes saddened and anxiously fixed on her face; but all the while she kept hers lowered. Now she smiled: "You could. A man can—"

"So can you, Chickie. At twenty-two? You can for you did no violence to your spirit."

Her cheeks blanched as though the blood sucked back. For suddenly she felt that Jake was going over all her life; was weighing her; her love and her giving—and that he knew it all, even to the words they might have said.

This was so, for he went on: "There are some who are inwardly hurt by such an experience. They can't rise above the world's opinion. They're weak and so they are crushed."

"I am one of them—"

Jake's hand gripped hers. "You are not." The pressure of his fingers made her wince so that she raised her eyes and found his flashing: "You are not, Helena, my dear. Don't try and stall like that on me. I saw you in action. Come now—what shows have you seen—what movie stars have you met?"

"Oh—why, you know—"

"What shows have you seen? Answer!"

She looked at him, pleading: "Wildie and I don't go to shows. We take long walks at night. It's so lovely down here, and you'd be surprised at all the stunning colors that go trooping over the hills. I love that—"

"And when were you to a show, did you say? The last time, I mean."

"Maybe a year ago."

"Call it a year and a day, Helena. To-morrow night we step"

"No. I'd rather ride with you, Jake. I want to hear about Jonathan—every single thing—and about you and Janina—every one. I'm starved for talk."

"You shall be filled. There's time. We'll ride to-night. Which of the drives down here do you like best?"

"All of them—they're beautiful—"

"And you know none of them?" Again his eyes surveyed her, kindling and tender. "We shouldn't have let you come alone, Helena, dear, should we?"

"I guess you think I've not been very brave, Jake, don't you? You think I've just sunk down and haven't shown any heart at all? Maybe that's true. But I thought I should keep to myself. I thought that was the only honest thing to do."

"Why?"

"Oh—if people knew, they wouldn't want me. But I'm not going to tell any one, so I really haven't a right to friendship. It's like stealing. . . ."

Jake answered, "I have a great respect for a clever thief." And as he smoothed the frilly collar of Chickie's sport suit he whispered, "I could teach you a thing or two about stealing, Helena. It looks as though I'll have to."

They drove through the Topango Canyon, and there was the great wall of mountains to their right and the gorges, wooded, seeming wild and black under the night. They climbed, and the sky of delft came near—vast and silent with its mystery. Suddenly the ocean was before them, all luminous, the way the moon went walking, like some majestic giant queen, trailing robes of silver from her shoulders.

Chickie gave a little cry. "The water—oh, I've longed for it"

Jake slumped down cozily, making a place for her with his arm. "You missed it, Chickie? You miss home and all?"

"Oh, so much."

"I had an idea. I'll carry it out some day." He laughed. "I was coming down here to fetch you with the yacht. Oh, it was to be quite fine. Jennie and Jonathan along. They'd like it. Chickie, I wonder why you don't send for them?"

"Oh, no; I couldn't do that—not yet, Jake. Well, it would be even harder—I mean for them. Yes, it would. They're just anchored where they are."

"Do you think of coming back?"

"Yes, but then I picture myself getting a job—away from Montgomery Street. Then some one remembers about me and all and tells it, and you know how that would be and how the men would stare; and things they would think. I'd never, never find any path open then. Isn't that true?"

For a long while Jake was silent. He kept his eyes on the water, his hand clasped on hers. He said sadly: "We don't always know what we are doing. Helena, I want to ask this of you—if such a thing happens and you feel that no paths are opened, will you send for me?"

She didn't answer, suddenly filled with foreboding.

"Will you?"

She said, breathless, "You're sorry for me, Jake. You pity me."

He smiled. "Maybe. Call it that. But I won't stand by and see Life play the bully with you. It's an old trick of hers to lay her club on the white and the gentle. Now listen—"

And he began to tell her a hundred bright incidents; an old woman who dabbled in stocks. He gave her a tip. She won, played another tip, cleaned up a hundred thousand, then asked him, Jake, the lord, if he'd like to marry her! She'd leave him all her money—

"Now, it was downright hard refusing the venerable dame; I mean doing it with éclat—dropping to my knees and pleading previous engagements. Oh, I did it gallant-like. Overdid it, in fact.

"Well—you remember Nicky? Our dear old bachelor, Nicky? Trapped! By a long-nosed Jane with a Sunday school slit of a mouth. Poor Nick—never a cocktail again!"

Chickie laughed: "More—tell me more, Jake—" The sparkling magnetism went racing through her veins. . . . She felt alive; felt young. She wished this meeting would last and last—no to-morrow—

They sat hours at the water's edge, the breeze but a warm and tender song about their heads. They watched until the moon drew screens of jade and black across her face. Chickie's eyes were full of tears.

Jake raised his hand and wiped them. He said, "Why, Helena, dear?"

"Oh, I never thought to feel like this again. Never, Jake—"

Jake's red, smiling mouth was pale.

At the boarding house he said: "Did you think we were to leave you here and forget about you the way they did to the lost girl of the San Nicolas?"

"I don't know her—"

"When I take you in the yacht I'll show you the island—the rock heap way off from Santa Barbara where they left her all alone."

"For something that she did, Jake? For some great sin?"

"For nothing at all—just sailed away and forgot that she was left. Remember, now, to-morrow, and a new dress, my dear."

"When do you leave, Jake?"

"That's a movable feast, Helena."

She went lightly up the stairs, smiling. She sat on the bed—shutting her eyes so that only the sparkle and the vividness was alive within her thoughts.

Don't think—don't go beneath—let loose the thousand images, the thousand contrasts Jake's coming had so deeply stirred. Oh—it was enough to have a friend like this—she should be glad.

And she bought the new dress. She polished her nails until they shone.

Her face was a white flower. Its dark eyes pierced because they thanked him so. He didn't want her sad—why should she be? He said: "No lipsticks any more, Chickie?"

She laughed: "I guess I don't quite suit you, Mr. Jake. You aren't pleased that I'm no longer vain."

He grinned. "Try mine, Chickie—won't come off." He brought a little package from his pocket, made her open it.

In a gold case with the most delicate figures done in enamel was a fine French rouge.

Chickie touched it with her finger, dabbed a little on her pale, sweet mouth.

"That's better, Helena."

She said, "You think I've been a coward, Jake?"

"No—but you must be vainer than you ever were. The world wants a bright face toward it. Don't you know that?"

"Oh, I see what you are meaning! And I should be ashamed

of pale lips—" She laughed. "You make everything seem different, Jake. You make it seem worth while . . ."

"It is—Chickie—" His eyes were deep and glowing. He leaned across the table, taking her hand in both of his. Then he smiled. "Yes—worth while—"

CHAPTER VIII

JAKE'S PLEA

THEY walked along chummily, like nice old maids, Jake said. Chickie's thoughts clung to him; held fast to the strength and vivid faith he offered.

Often in these three days she had glanced upward suddenly, and met a smile of royal kindness. Each time she thought: "What does he think? Am I ever so much less in his eyes? Is he remembering? Of course—of course—"

Yet his eyes dwelt glowingly on hers, and it made her heart warm the way he drew her arm in his, clasping so firmly her slim, white hand.

"So, this is where you walk of nights, Helena?"

"Yes."

"Just you and Wildie? But you're not going to do that any more?"

There came a wistful quiet, like a twilight, to her eyes. With her free hand she traced the lofty sweep of mountains marching so nobly under a canopy all jeweled with stars.

A breathless night, the air sighing with the warmth and languor of the day that had passed. She said, with a little break in her voice: "Oh, Jake, those are wonderful friends to have. You don't know, perhaps, but I can feel them like a person. They seem kind—kinder than anything excepting you. And I don't mind the loneliness—no, really. I feel so quiet here, so safe. But it's not that way with people. I'm afraid then; I suppose that's the coward in me, but I'm always afraid then."

"What do you fear?"

"Well," she lowered her head, running her finger back and forth across his hand, "you know, Jake. It could happen. I often dream about it. Some one comes up and stands so close the breath smothers me. They say, 'Oh, Helena Bryce! Ah, you come from San Francisco—'"

Jake shook back the proud black head, glancing at her with

pondering eyes. "If that happens, Chickie, you will meet it. You have met worse."

She trembled, her fingers clenching on his arm. "Not again! I would rather die! Oh, I would die, Jake!"

He kept looking at her—at her profile, with the white, chiseled purity that had once so fired his exultant passions. He put his hands on her shoulders, held her so. "Chickie, never say that again. Never think it. You can't do it! I say, you can't!"

She tried to smile, awed by the tenseness in his face. He took out his handkerchief, drew it over the thick, glossy hair. Presently the smile returned to the red, flashing mouth. "That's not the way to look at it, Chickie."

"What do you mean, Jake?"

"That you can't go on as you have. You can't keep to yourself and brood."

"Oh—it's easy to say that, Jake. But what should I do? What else may I do?"

"The very same as you did before any of this happened. Look at life freely. It can be a fine, happy thing. Yes, it can! Look to the future just as you did a few years ago when you wanted that grand old wind to come sweeping over mountain tops. It will come, Chickie—"

Tears leaped to her eyes. Oh, that vision of her girlhood—love coming in glory, setting her and one other in a glowing world apart. She had spoken of it to Jake; told him with wide-open, fervid eyes how much she hoped from life. He had looked into the young, ardent heart and because he was so seasoned, read aright its sweetness and its dream.

"Look to that, Chickie, and not to the moments that are gone. Don't let them touch you at all. Put them from your memory."

She looked a long while at her hands. "Do you know what you're saying, Jake? Why, you talk as though I could have it all my own way. But I can't. And the past isn't gone. Oh, it isn't at all. And I'm not the same as I was. I never can be. You know that. But even if I were callous about it, people wouldn't let me be the same. It's just as I said before—if people knew about me, they would be furious."

She turned suddenly from him, biting her lips. They walked to the top of the hill. Jake patted her hand.

"In a few months, Helena dear, you will look at things

coolly. Why—some of the richest and happiest natures I've ever met had plenty to regret. What of it? We live and we learn. When Life hands us a jolt the only way we can get even with her is to straighten up more squarely than before." Jake swung the giant shoulders: "And you tell me I don't know—why, you little white darling, I've gone the curved road and I do know—"

"Oh—but a man, Jake—it makes no difference with a man—"

"And it must make no difference with you. I'm telling you something. You're not to come up here and make friends with mountains. When you're lonely, sit ye down and write to an old dog. And listen to me, Helena—how would it be if you were to pick up with a few old ladies, carry them a bunch of daisies of a Saturday afternoon? Or, I'll tell you, take yourself down to a hospital and cast a few smiles at old cronies that have come to the end of the road. If I were an old buck on the last lap and one Helena Bryce came over and gave me a smile, I'd like that! I'd like it mighty well."

She said, turning to him with shimmering eyes: "Jake—if all the world were like you—"

He laughed. "We'd be so busy hiding the cross in our own eyes we'd never see the beam in another's. That's it! But you do that, will you, Helena? And you'll find that many doors are opened and they'll lead to broader sweeps than a friend of mine of several years ago could ever have entered."

"Why, Jake—?"

"Oh—she was such a pretty darling—"

She looked at him sharply. "You mean I was so shallow? And so vain? And so tickled with myself?"

He squeezed her hands: "And such a love, Chickie, dear—"

"But I'm all that yet, Jake. I just am. And all these things you've said show it. I haven't really tried to fight, have I? I'm just as weak as weak! Only I know it now—"

"No—not weak. But just new to this up grade road. You'll have to throw her into second to make it. And you will. Helena, shall I tell you something? I was half afraid to come that morning. I never thought to find you quiet and strong—"

"Oh—and I wasn't! I leaned and leaned on Jonathan. I made him bear it all—"

"I saw for myself, Helena. I didn't hear you say a word of blame; a single excuse."

"Ho! I hadn't any. I did it all myself. All of it!" She swayed a little, clasping her hands against her mouth, half murmuring to herself: "Don't think—hush—"

Jake drew her. With his arm about her shoulder he took her hands, pressed them in his palms.

"I've thought of that day a lot, Helena dear. I've thought of another day, too. Would it hurt too much if I speak of it?"

"You couldn't do a thing to hurt, Jake."

"Well—it was that Saturday you bumped against us in Montgomery Street and I made you come to lunch. About a year ago—you know when I mean?"

"Oh—" The stabbing in her throat made it hard to breathe. Did she know? That awful day when she had waited in the office till Stella and Janina were gone; the day she gave up hope because no word had come and she half knew none ever was to come.

"How pale you were, Helena dear, and the gallant bluff you made. Suppose I am a man; can't I know that that was hard? Can't I know the grit it took and the strength? Look up at me, Helena dear." He raised her face and, though her eyes were closed, he wiped away the tears. "And don't I know that doors will open—any door you want. And you will have the dream yet—"

She moved her lips. She put up her hand between his face and hers. "Not that door, Jake. No—I never want it opened—oh, really, really—all that is ended—"

"Why—ended! It hasn't yet begun. You must want it. I tell you, you must."

"Don't, Jake—please—don't say so— Oh, I can do those other things—yes, and I will. But I won't ever ask for what you mean. And I won't ever want it. I am so still inside."

He laid his hand on her soft, fair cheek. He smiled. And that night as he left he stood before her like a king, with his head bared. He looked down at her. "Helena, think of me, will you? When you think of that last door think of me, too—do that—please—"

CHAPTER IX

SERVICE

THERE was no light in the room. The oak table where Chickie sat was all in shadow. Yet there seemed a glow, a murmuring about her like echoes of some luminous song.

Her hands lay folded in her lap. She felt a warmth and a brightness now like a rush of tears to her throat; and now like a joy or a proud smile touching her lips.

She said "Oh" and raised her head as though she saw a thing of beauty; saw faith and hope before her.

She walked about the room with light, delicate step. Yes—open doors; she could. Well, she would. Hard, up-grade road, but quiet and strong and she would make it—

Jake said she must, and he stood before her, royal fellow that he was, saying so easily: "Look at life freely, Helena dear, as you did a few years ago when that grand old wind of yours was to come sweeping over mountain tops—"

She heard the rich, throaty voice; felt the clasp of the strong hand. Oh—he was princely, coming to her like that. She had for Jake a feeling of gratitude that was akin to worship. The way he raised her face, wiping the tears—why, she cried now, remembering it. He said she would be better and finer. She would make him glad to trust her so. She felt brave for anything.

Her emotion raised her to this state of tremulous exaltation. But it was a sexless thing; as much so as her devotion to Jonathan.

There had been a time when Jake's black, flashing eyes looking at her so warmly had stirred her subtly though against her will. That night when he wanted so to kiss her; when he caught her hands and his lips were a flame moving over her palms—that night she was half terrified because of the breathless thrill stealing so pervasively upon her.

It was her spirit now that had been touched—not her heart. Love, with its tumult and its wild expectance, she would

never feel again. Oh—she was sure of this. That last door Jake spoke of was closed—closed always.

There was a sense of finality about it that even now brought a chill to Chickie's thoughts. She had so wanted sweetness; so wanted joy. Love had been as life to her. Love had been the glory and the dream.

So much so indeed that when she found it gone there had come an utter darkness, as though living, too, was finished. Coming here to Los Angeles she had gone to work, she had taken walks, she had read . . . but all this she did without vividness, as an automaton might. And for months she dwelt in this muteness; in this gray and brooding solitude.

That was no way to do! Jake made her feel its weakness; made it seem a selfish, cowardly way to go. There were others in the world. If the gladness were over for her she could be glad for others; bunches of daisies for a few old ladies, or a smile to an old man dying. Hers wasn't the only heart with grief for a lodger. Learn that!

So he gave her an impulse to live; gave her a reason to laugh. It altered her vision—made her even welcome the coming of days.

She missed him. The day after he left it seemed so empty—so very still—lonelier much than before. She went over scenes, recalled words. She sat at her table and wrote letters, one to Jake, another to herself.

Childish thing to do, but she wanted to grip with both hands on this new strength she had glimpsed. She wanted to bind herself; keep Jake and the heartening things he said close in her thoughts. She wrote:

"Dear Jake: I have the daisies ready and am now scouring the byways for some nice, decrepit old man; startle him back to life with the most radiant smile. When you come again there shall await you the cosiest family of venerable old ladies this city of angels can furnish. Shall you like that, Mr. Jake, and more proposals to refuse?

"Oh, really, Jake, you don't know all the difference and how I thank you. I am wearing very scarlet lips. But that's not all. You have the kindest heart in the world. I can never say it all. You will see. I mean to do these things. I really do."

To herself, she wrote over and over one line:

"Dear Helena: There are many doors in this world. You

are to open them—open them. You are to forget the past—put it completely from your thoughts. Well—you are! You shall!"

Daisy Brack said to her one noon time: "Well, you're coming out of it, aren't you?"

Chickie started: "What, Daisy?"

"The thing that gets us all but it got you even more than it did me. Homesick—I thought I never could stick it out—"

Chickie laughed: "Well—was that my trouble, Daisy? I didn't know just what had got me."

Yet when Saturday afternoon came and she considered her plan, she was all at once in a panic. She had never visited a hospital.

She said to herself, weakening: "Maybe they don't permit it. It may seem ridiculous."

But she looked up the address. She went to a florist and brought a dollar's worth of cosmos in every delicate shade of pink and lavender and blue.

She was coming out of the shop, her arms filled, when some one touched her with an eager: "Are you decorating the graves of all the hearts you've broken, Helena?"

It was Lee Willman, his deep, large eyes alit.

She blushed, unwilling to state her mission. But he walked at her side: "Let me drive you?"

"I can't. You see I'm visiting a friend at the hospital."

"My car will drive to a hospital. Which one?"

She laughed: "The city and county—so you see I can't trouble you."

He repeated softly: "Oh—" then swiftly: "Won't you please let me take you? That's only a friendly offer, isn't it? Please—" and he began taking the flowers from her arms: "You have bought enough, I hope."

"I'll be there quite a while—in fact all afternoon."

"No you won't—they don't allow visitors to spend the afternoon." And he brushed aside her opposition, helping her to the machine. It made her quiet with an odd sense of defeat.

She scarcely spoke as he drove her. She said, leaving the machine, "Real nice in you, Mr. Willman."

"Can't I come in with you, Helena? Can't I carry the flowers?"

She shook her head with a gesture of dismissal. "I've imposed enough."

Inside, she didn't know what to do. She hesitated so that the girl at the telephone switch asked, "Which ward do you want?"

Chickie stammered, "Well—is it permitted—I've brought these flowers—"

"Oh, you just want to leave them. Take that turn to the left. The nurse will be glad to get them."

And the nurse took them from her in a very abrupt manner, as though she was not at all pleased.

Chickie said, "I'd like to visit the old men's ward."

The girl laughed. "It's all right with me. Help yourself," like a smart slap.

She went down the corridor, turned this way and that. A door opened. She looked in; a man who was not old pulled the covers hastily to his chin and frowned. Chickie hurried. She stood at a window and looked into a garden. A nurse in white sat in a chair, her feet stretched out. She was sleeping.

Chickie walked back—waited. Willman was still there, smoking lazily, as though he were prepared to spend the rest of the afternoon. Tears blinked at Chickie's eyes. Ho—what did Jake know of hospitals? Why—she'd like to bet he'd never been in one.

She went out. Willman sprang from the car. "How is your friend? Better now?"

Chickie smiled. He looked at her with rapt, fervent eyes. "So this is the way you spend your Saturdays, Helena? Well—"

She said: "Oh, no—only to-day."

But a smile kindled in his face.

Chickie became busy with a lock of hair that had worked out from her net. She tucked it in, surveying it critically in a small mirror. She did this to hide from Willman her eyes because they would keep blinking and blinking with her disappointment. Ho! Visit the hospital! Why, it was just foolish. Jake never meant to do a thing like that—walk into the corridors like a simpleton and ask for the old men's ward! Old men who were sick would be thrilled indeed to have some busybody grinning at them, saying cheerfully, "Feeling better today?"

Chickie bit her lips. She was aware of Willman's glance and thought with a trace of impatience: "Why did I have to meet him, too?"

CHAPTER X

THE GOLDEN GIRL

"In all this fairyland can't you find a better recreation for your afternoon off then visiting a hospital?"

"Is that such an odd thing to do, Mr. Willman?"

"Yes—for a girl like you—spending your earnings to carry flowers to a hospital." He grew silent, driving now through a broad avenue. To their right and before them, rugged, yet softly purple in the sun, stretched a vast wall of mountains, the distant San Gabriels. "Have you been to Mount Lowe?"

"No—"

"Next Saturday I'll take you there."

"Oh—" a sharp breath, like a sigh.

Willman heard it, put his hand on hers with an impetuous: "There! Now why do you do that? Why do you sigh?"

Chickie laughed. "You are in an evil mood to-day, I fear. Why pick on me if I grab off a long breath now and then?"

He said, the color in his face quickened and the boyish light in his eyes: "Well—have your vows against us all, Helena. But there are a thousand things to see here and I'm going to be your guide. You can't object to that, can you? Why refuse a flower to me when you are so free with them to others? My need is greater."

Chickie recalled with a pang Jake's advice. "Face life freely, just as you did before—" How could she do that? She sank down amongst the cushions, managed to smile. "I was bringing those flowers to an old, old man, Mr. Willman."

"Count me as old as Methuselah then and hand me the bouquet. Listen, Helena, it can't interfere any with you, can it? You can dismiss me without a moment's notice. I promise to bear no grudge. But we are to be friends. I'd love to take you around— I know the South well—"

She said softly, as one vanquished: "I have told you—"

In this way a friendship that drifted happily through the late summer and autumn began. The Sundays that were so long, so filled with memories, found Chickie in the neglected garden of

the boarding-house. She would go walking about, talking to Wildie, whispering to herself, "Will he come to-day?", knowing that he would.

She was always glad to see him. She couldn't help this. It was her youth meeting the sweetness of his.

They would drive out through the hills, going up and up until they left the whole world behind them. Then he would look at her, a soft fire in his eyes.

At these times her heart oppressed her. It told her, "He loves you. You're hurting him. He would turn from you horror-stricken if he knew. He thinks you purer and more beautiful than any girl he has ever met."

At this, memories rose in warm, living pools and drew her into them. Most piercing of these was that night two years ago when she had gone to Bess Abbot's marriage. How she had prayed in that hushed, yearning way for the moment when they two—she and Barry—would be standing before an altar giving the promises. The tears had filled her eyes because it was so tender and so beautiful to love. Afterwards he kissed her saying with his young eyes alight:

"Ah, frail, I would it were thee and me." The dearness of his kiss, the flame and beauty of that sweet lost emotion!

The dream had passed for her. Because it had been so glowing, she understood the intensity of Lee Willman's emotion. She knew that he loved and exalted her. She was to him an angel.

One Sunday they drove deep into the purple hills, going higher, higher, till the lovely homes of Pasadena were but little white blots in the rolling valley.

"You've not traveled much, Helena. Did you ever read Le Gallienne's 'Quest of the Golden Girl'?"

"No—"

"Well, it tells about a fellow who went gypsying—searching, of course, for the girl of dreams."

"Did he find her?"

"Oh, that part is rather tragic, but I was just thinking what fun it would be to roam like a troubador, taking the Golden Girl along for company. Did you ever imagine yourself a wandering tramp?"

"Yes—"

"And you'd like it?"

"I dare say I would."

"Well, then, let's! Now, look here, Helena, that's not an illicit proposal. I've been planning this for some time. Let's off to the county clerk's and get a license. We'd have a gorgeous time jaunting here and there."

She laughed.

He said a little wistfully: "Oh, why don't you think of me seriously, Helena? I love you so."

"It's your dream you love, Lee."

"You're my dream. I never had a dream till you came."

"Yes—you did. You've always been searching for the Golden Girl."

"I've found her now—"

"I'm not that. Lee, please don't say it—"

He looked into her face and grinned. "Oh, you dear, beautiful angel—you are that! Some day you'll admit it."

An hour like this made her sick with foreboding. She determined to break off their companionship. It could only end in desolation.

For a month she refused ruthlessly all his invitations. He kept her late two or three afternoons a week pretending to have important letters. He would sit on the desk, his long legs crossed, his eyes fixed musingly on her face. She would tap her pencil, rustle the pages. He only laughed.

One evening he leaned down and said soberly:

"Helena, we're pretty good friends, aren't we?"

"Oh, I guess so."

"Then why do you keep so aloof? You seem so gay and so careless, but I feel always that underneath you're awfully sad. You know, I'd give anything if you thought enough of me to be confidential. Tell me what makes you like this. What has happened that you're always putting a wall between us? Don't get up—I want to finish. I've been wanting to say it for months. Why is it that you get distracted whenever I tell you that I love you?"

She rubbed her eraser over the letter in her typewriter. He covered her nervous hands:

"Helena, why do you get agitated?"

Without looking at him she said softly, but very distinctly, "It won't do any good, Lee, because I can't tell you. It's just that I've had a great sorrow—a really terrible tragedy—and I can't forget it. It's because of this I intend never to think of love."

He was so young, his ideals as far as she was concerned, so high and so passionate in their beauty, that his eyes filled when she said this. She seemed more than ever white and lovely to him.

He was about to answer, he was bending over her, when the door suddenly opened and a tall girl with the same restless grace as Willman's entered. She had a small, dark face, dark snappy eyes, a mouth skilfully curved, yet thin and cold. She glanced at them astonished, tapping her foot with a trace of annoyance.

Chickie had seen her several times. She was Edith Potter, oldest daughter of Norp Willman.

The girls in the office talked of her. They said she was a "climber." She'd had several pretty stenographers dismissed because her brother showed them favors.

Edith Potter had married for money and social position. Her brother scorned her ambitions, but she was determined to engineer a distinguished marriage for him.

She now came toward them, her hand extended.

"Oh, pardon me, Lee. I seem to have interrupted a pleasant conversation."

Willman's mouth gripped, a sullenness dropping over the lighted eyes. "Why mention it, Edith? A little old habit of yours!"

Their looks clashed but she went on amiably. "Where's father?"

"He left some time ago."

"How annoying! I meant to drive home with him. Perhaps you're going, Lee? I'll go with you."

"Thanks for the honor, Edith, but I'm not going home. Call a taxi."

Edith smiled sarcastically.

All this while she was appraising Chickie. It seemed to Chickie she was all but counting the hairs of her head.

Suddenly with an ironic laugh she slipped across the room, pressed the electric button.

They were then conscious that the room had been dim; they had been sitting there a long time; that it was after six o'clock.

The door closed. Neither looked at the other. Then Willman slid from the table with an impatient shrug.

"I didn't introduce you, Helena. That's my sister, Mrs. Potter. She's a vixen."

Chickie said only: "I knew it was your sister."

Her heart oppressed her as though she had been detected in some guilt. The whole evening she squirmed, recollecting the encounter—the darkness of the room and the sarcastic laugh as Edith flashed the light.

CHAPTER XI

TRACKED

SATURDAY afternoon in late October. The first faint touch of Autumn in the softness and the sadness of the breeze. Lee Willman calling for Chickie just as she was about to take Wildie for a walk.

"You're treating me wretchedly," he said happily, "and I've no longer any mind to put up with it. You're not going to refuse me to-day."

She was glad for his company. There were times like this October day when she dreaded long hours alone. When she felt that her mind would break under the strain of this long, terrible quiet. She would walk through the tunnel, buy the evening paper, stand a long while talking to Julie, the brown, bent old lady who sold the Sunday papers. When Julie said, "Ah, bless your bright, pretty face," Chickie could have kissed her.

So now she ran into the house and got her hat and came out laughing to go with Lee Willman.

They went dashing along and Chickie said, "Faster, Lee. Go faster!"

He rose gaily to her mood.

"Is it because you're glad to see me that you're so like yourself to-day, Helena?"

"Like myself?" she bantered. "And who am I like usually, if you please?"

"I mean you're like you were meant to be—happy inside as well as outside."

Then she grew quiet.

They parked on a hill dense with trees.

"Now I've said the wrong thing, haven't I?"

"No."

"Well, you've lost the sweet mood. Sister Helena, it's six months since we've met and I'm going to break my promise."

"No, don't do that."

"Yes, just for a moment. You say you can't love because you've had a great sorrow. But I love you, sorrow and all, and why can't you love me back?"

He reminded her of Jimmy when he said that. He had all of the boy's sweetness in his look and he wouldn't give her a chance to refuse.

"Oh, Helena, why do you need to think about this? You can't keep step with it forever. Just a little while ago you'd forgotten all about it, and if you'd think about me and if you'd take me, you'd forget altogether."

Because of the worship in his ardent eyes, Chickie felt old and hard. She said quietly:

"You don't know what you're saying. I see now it was wrong for me to have taken your friendship."

She thought of telling him in a few bald words what this trouble of hers was. One look at his face shining with faith checked her. She listened dumbly to the torrent of words that now came so eagerly, so pleadingly.

"You see, Helena, I've been in love with you from that first day I saw you in the office. I've thought about you incessantly. I know we could be happy. We like each other's company. I'd be so good to you, Helena, that you couldn't help but love me. I'd do anything you want. And you'd forget that you ever loved any one else and that it didn't come out the way you wanted."

Her eyes opened blankly. "Who told you, Lee? Who told you that?"

"You, Helena. Who else but you? What other tragedy could it be except something like that, and I can guess the way it was. I've been thinking lately that I could make it up to you—that I could make you forget all about it."

Almost inaudibly, "You could make me forget all, Lee?" And she was suddenly standing on Fisherman's Wharf, staring into the darkness, suddenly winding her hands around the beam, letting herself down into the black oily waters.

She sank low against the cushions, oblivious of Willman's presence.

He put his arms around her. He clasped them tenderly about her.

"Helena, dear, I wouldn't ask you to forget all. You could remember the sweetness and forget the pain." Then he murmured with such tenderness in his voice, "He died, Helena?"

"No, he didn't die."

"You sent him away?" It suddenly occurred to this young ardent boy that Chickie had loved a man who was worthless, perhaps a fellow who drank, that she had loved him madly and that he had done something terrible and that she had been forced to send him away. This was why her heart seemed broken.

Chickie said, "I can't talk to you about this," and sadly, "now, it's all ended." Her eyes filled with tears. "And I'm sorry, because it's been so sweet driving with you and you've been so good to me."

He said only, "Don't say it's ended, Helena, because if it's been sweet you must like me, and after a while, maybe in a year, you'll grow to love me."

She wished to go home but he insisted on driving to the beaches. He told her all the bright things he could think of.

Finally he said, "You don't have to love me, Helena, and I won't talk about it again, but you're not going to hide yourself away from me. Just suppose that I'm young and don't know my own mind, and that I only think I love you. Just suppose that I'll get over it but keep on going out with me." He laughed teasingly: "Do it to be a good influence, Helena—keep me from wild and wicked women. I'm young, you know, and impressionable."

They went to dinner. It was that French restaurant to which Jake had taken her, on the second floor, with the little porches at the windows and benches all along the wall.

The Saturday crowd gave a bright, holiday look to the room—the girls in their sport clothes and big summery hats.

They found a table in the corner. Willman, elated that he had found the solution to Chickie's mysterious sadness, and confident that her words meant hope for him, was in a joyful mood.

"How are all your old men at the hospital? Improving rapidly under your smiles? What gave you that hunch, Helena?"

"Oh, I don't know. I thought I'd make such a tender angel of mercy. You know, I'd rather like to be a nurse."

"Well, why don't you? The day you don a white cap I become an invalid for life."

They talked on and on.

Suddenly, Chickie became uncomfortable. She felt intense

eyes staring at her face. They drew her like magnets. She turned, looking full into the frowning face of Edith Potter.

A full minute ticked off before she became conscious of another girl leaning forward with tight lips and widened eyes.

The shock was so great she gasped, "Oh, there's Myra King and your sister!"

"Myra King? Do you know her?"

"Yes," said Chickie. "She's from San Francisco." She wondered how she was able to frame these words. She felt her breath distending—bursting from her. She wished to get up and dash from the room.

It had come—the shame and testing.

Myra King was a friend of Ila Moore's. She had attended the philosophy lectures. She had seen Chickie there. She knew about Chickie and Barry Dunne.

CHAPTER XII

ALBATROSS

He ordered avocados.

Chickie now stared at the ripe golden chalice of the fruit, thinking wildly:

"I wonder if she remembers me? Of course, of course! But she may not. Oh, why didn't I go home? Why did I come here?"

They were coming to the table. They were stopping. Willman became sullen. He stood up, greeting them curtly. Edith turned a significant look toward Chickie.

Willman said, "Miss Bryce, my sister, Mrs. Potter, and Miss King."

Myra King was a tall blonde girl with high coloring and large blue eyes. They had a squint—this was somewhat attractive.

She said slowly: "Miss Bryce? But haven't I met you somewhere? Are you from San Francisco?"

"Yes," said Chickie.

Myra frowned as though puzzled. "Perhaps I have you confused with some one else? Your face looks so familiar. Did you happen to know Bess Abbot?"

Then Chickie raised her head and looked with fiery quiet into Myra's large eyes that were now cold and piercing.

She said, "You haven't confused me with any one else, Miss King. You met me at the philosophy lectures."

Myra drew herself up, blushing as though Chickie's admission were an affront.

"Oh," she said—"yes—at Ila's." Her face turned sharp as a knife. "You came with Barry Dunne. I recall you perfectly—perfectly."

. . . . . .

Stiff and freezing, Chickie watched the two of them sauntering from the restaurant. Then her eyes were glued on her plate—

"What's the matter, Helena? You're white as a ghost."

She tried wanly to smile—"Oh, nothing, Lee—I'm tired—"

But she couldn't eat. She felt limp and sick—sick with anguish.

"They'll tell him—I should speak! I ought to say something now!" But his eyes were so ardent—so young and happy—She said vaguely,

"Will you see your sister to-night?"

"I should say not! Less I see of her the better we like each other. Why do you ask?"

"Well—" a little shaky laugh, "they'll talk about me!"

"Of course they will. That's Edith all right!"

"They'll tell you about me!"

"No, they won't! They won't tell me whom to like! Edith knows better than that. I've shut her up a few times already. Why should you care, Helena?"

She wasn't listening. She was hearing Myra King telling it to Edith—the baby; its death; the trial. She was reliving that torturing hour when the coroner, leaning forward, his slothful eyes on a level with the table, shouted: "Brings a dead infant to the doctor; a child whose coming kept her from the bedside of her dying mother. An unmarried woman—a woman in hiding might have many reasons for getting rid of her child!"

He kept talking, twitting her because she was so sensitive; because she turned white as a ghost.

She said numbly: "I wish you'd take me home, Lee. I feel awfully queer."

He got up quickly, full of anxious consideration. She felt beaten and crushed.

At the door she said forlornly: "Oh, good-by, Lee. You won't see me any more. No—no—I mean it—I want to write to you—a long, long letter—"

He thought all that was because his sister had "butted in." He said with boyish indignation, "Oh, yes, I'll see you again. But write me the letter—I'd love a long, long letter."

. . . . . .

She went up and threw herself on the bed, rolling over, burying her face in her arms. Weak and emptied of fight, saying to herself miserably, "Why didn't I tell him?"

Why must she tell him? Confess to this young, eager boy—

why should this be necessary? Must she go about as Janina taunted, shouting "Unclean"—warning people from her? She asked nothing from him. She was no menace that she should be denied every young, bright companionship—

But now they would tell him. She cowered, fancying the look of him when he heard. She lay there on the bed, her thoughts beating like clubs on her tired mind.

She got up early after that sleepless, tormenting night. She tried writing to him. She did this because she wanted to save him from the withering shock. She would tell it so that he might see a reason, a terrible and tragic sadness rather than a shame in the thing she had done. The effort wasted her. It brought back so trenchantly those scarring emotions.

She sat at the window staring into the back yard. Wildie saw her and barked, pawing with his front feet. When she paid no attention he scratched and whined so at the kitchen door, Mrs. Janis let him in. He came bounding to Chickie's door, knocking his flank against it.

When she let him in, he barked as though he would inquire what she meant sitting there so quiet. He looked up at her, his ears erect and his tail stiff.

She stroked him absently. He crouched a moment, his head between his paws; then he went over to the closet and fetched her shoe, dropped it at her feet. He did this several times, leaping up and giving her cheek a few hasty licks with his tongue.

At last he seemed to understand and put his head on her knee. This touched her—a dog has such a kind, kind look. She caught the loose skin about his neck and rolled it.

"Love your pretty lady, dog, no matter what!"

Mrs. Janis knocking at the door; "There's a lady in the parlor wishes to see you."

"A lady?"

"Yes—a tall, dark lady—"

"Oh—is there any one in the parlor now?"

"Yes—Miss Cheesman is there sewing."

"What does the lady look like—thin? Dark eyes? Yes? Keep her waiting a moment. Then bring her here."

Almost staggering, Chickie went across the room, pulled the blankets over the bed—straightened the books on her table.—Edith Potter calling to see her—what right had she to come?—How dared she come here?

Scarcely able to draw a breath, Chickie sat in the big, old armchair at the window, stroking Wildie's head.

A knock—Edith entering, the dark, snapping eyes resting on Chickie.

"May I speak with you, Miss Bryce?"

"Certainly—be seated—"

"That won't be necessary. You probably know why I've come." She glided across the room facing Chickie who had risen. "The insolence of you going out with my brother!"

Chickie, with her hand on Wildie's head stared in his sister's face.

"The viciousness of it! It's to cease! You're not to see him again. Understand? I know all about you! Absolutely all! You think you can come down here and palm yourself off as a good, decent girl? You think you can victimize my family? You can't! I've taken vigorous measures to save my brother from your wiles. This is a warning. Don't see him again!"

Wildie sniffed at Edith's skirt, sensing the blaze of her anger. He growled.

"No—Wildie—Down—" Chickie took the damp snout in her hands. She said faintly, "Do not tell your brother—He's so young—Don't tell him—I won't see him again—"

"DON'T! Let it be very certain—"

The door closing heavily—Chickie slumped in the chair.

. . . . . .

Moments thumped—they went thudding and pulsing over her—hours of these. Again some one knocking at the door—some one murmuring, "Helena—oh, Helena!"

She flew across the room—she opened the door narrowly—"Lee—no—don't come in—"

He pushed past her. "Let me see you—Oh, Helena!" His face was whiter than chalk.

CHAPTER XIII

THE BROKEN DREAM

Chickie backed into the room, her eyes on that white face. Lee Willman followed.

He stood against the door, his head lowered. He stood so and didn't speak.

Chickie's hands were folded and her lips parted. She looked at this boy who had kneeled to her; whose arms had touched in ecstasy about her shoulders. This youth who had exalted her until she was but beauty and a spirit. She saw his face stricken with shame and the pain she had to bear was like the throat or the heart torn living and slowly out of one.

He spoke in a muffled tone, barely audible: "I know what she did, Helena, I know about it. I'm ashamed to stand before you."

She shivered, a confusion in her mind. And suddenly, glancing upward, beheld his eyes, worshiping, humble. They dropped a terror upon her because of what they told; because of their young, passionate faith so blindly shining.

He said hoarsely, as though the effort were enormous:

"Helena, don't blame me. You don't think I could dream she'd do a ghastly thing like this? She stops at nothing to win her point. She's been crabbing to my father ever since that night she came to the office—oh, before that. She wanted him to fire you. She knew I loved you! I told her so! So she does this! I could kill her! I never dreamed she'd stoop this far."

She swayed a little, folding more tightly her hands. They were so cold. She looked down at her feet, noticing the points of her slippers, fastening on this common detail to steady her thoughts.

Then she said, with the breath of it an agony: "What are you meaning? Oh—it doesn't matter—nothing matters. Nothing. Do you know all? All of it?"

He took a hurried step, caught her two hands, "Don't think about it, Helena—I know enough—"

"Ah, yes—and you? What do you say? What do you think of me now?"

"Helena! Do you think I believe a single word? She could shout it to the heavens—"

She rocked from him—with a little wild gesture shoved his hands from hers.

He stood bewildered, the intent vividness fading from his face. It became like powdered ash. He asked, incredulous: "Why do you treat me like this? Do you blame me? How could I guess?"

She smiled, her lips drawn white with desperation. She tried to speak, to bravely meet his eyes. But she could only fold her hands; only press them mutely.

He touched those icy hands. "Helena—are you hurt too much? You never wish to see me again? Is that it?"

The wound hidden so deeply in her heart opened, flowing with a warm, new anguish; it seemed to her that she was slaying something; a frail, radiant thing. She must do this—stand here and watch it die. Her spirit cowered—it sank down and covered its face.

He said: "Speak to me, Helena—won't you?"

She shook her head. She turned from him, motioning that he must go. "Please—oh, now—oh, go—"

He came swiftly, his hands on her shoulders. He swept her about and looked into her face. Her eyes confessed what the moving lips had refused.

Moments his breath choked. He held her so, the light flaming and deadening in his face. The trembling of his hands was terrible and put a deadly faintness through her. He crossed his arms, to steady them, about her. He leaned down and whispered: "Helena, you look so! You're white—you mean—oh, don't look so! As though it's true! As though you mean it's true!"

She nodded heavily. She saw a cold, bluish pallor all about his mouth, beads standing on his forehead. He said, unbelieving: "Do you mean this? It's true?"

She loosened his hands. It seemed to her that she should comfort him; that she should wipe his face.

But he would not believe. He said, fighting for his voice: "You can't know. You can't know what she said. You can't have done that thing."

She kept nodding.

"You don't know. Helena! She said there was a trial—"

"Not that—I was innocent of that—"

"But the rest—oh, God, it's true, Helena!"

"It's true."

He moaned—he looked at her, the youth and fervor gone. Clapping his hands in a spasm over his face, he went blindly to the door, fumbled with the knob.

Gone—Chickie watched the door close. She went over and turned the knob gently. Then she leaned against it, no moan on her lips, no protest in her heart.

Only a terror—a numb, still terror.

She stood there, losing count of time. Once she opened the door, half expecting to find him returned.

She sat all afternoon with her hands folded idly in her lap.

He had looked for a thing exquisite in life; he had found it in her. Now the dream was gone.

Chickie turned her face against the chair. Now she imagined he would run his car swiftly over a cliff; now she saw him walking out into the surf. She had done this to him. Her anguish was a numb, fearful thing. It pressed on her like weights—weights loaded with ice and stone.

All night she lay awake, taut—shivering. Once she dozed. His sister opened the door, hissing: "Murderess!" Chickie started up, her heart flying with terror.

Long before six o'clock she went out to buy a newspaper. She searched it, half fainting with suspense. It contained nothing.

But that evening Norp Willman came to the boarding house. He came to Chickie's door, saying bluntly, "Is my son here?"

"No"—Her breath failed.

"Do you know where he is?"

"No"—

"Have you seen him—well, since yesterday morning?" She shook her head, unable to frame a single word.

Norp Willman drew a sharp, struggling breath—and wiped his forehead: "I beg your pardon, Miss Bryce. I am afraid. I don't know where he is. His car was found in the hills."

CHAPTER XIV

PAYING THE PIPER

"He left Pasadena yesterday morning. He found out—he learned that his sister had come here. I understand he meant to see you—"

Willman spoke heavily. He had been standing with his weight resting on his hands. Now he turned the chair and slumped into it, half shading his face with a great handkerchief. "He didn't get here?"

Chickie answered with her breath crowding and faint: "Yes." She tried to think clearly, but the air was thick and damp. It seemed rising in waves, half drowning her.

"He got here?"

"Oh, yes—"

The father's somber eyes surveyed her, then shifted. He passed his hand again and again over his face. "Do you know where he went, Miss Bryce? Did he say what he was going to do?"

As he asked this the blood seemed to drop from his cheeks. Chickie stood before him, her eyes lowered as one accused. The sense of guilt pressed upon her, robbing her of strength.

"He didn't say; no—he didn't say—"

Willman rose, standing uncertain and struggling. He started to speak, became absorbed rubbing his hand over his hat. Finally he tore the words out. "My son is a strange boy. He always was. I understand he was in love with you—wished to marry you. He quarreled with his sister yesterday on account of you."

Chickie closed her eyes. "Yes—"

"Pardon me—if you would tell me how he left—you are the last person to see him. How was he? Did he make any threats?"

It became now an effort to breathe—an effort to keep the form of Lee Willman's father from wavering before her. Yet she heard in her mind an imperious command, like another voice, ordering her to speak; demanding that she put down

this violent weakness that went with such heavy pulsing through her nerves.

She said in a low, distant tone: "There were things told about me. He thought them false. When he found that they were true—I told him so; I had to tell him. Well, he left. He didn't say a word. He left."

"You quarreled? He left in anger?"

"We didn't quarrel. He left. That's all."

She shut her eyes, pressing her fingers against her throat.

Norp Willman came to her side. He kept brushing his hat with his palm. "What do you think, Miss Bryce? Will you answer—was he desperate? He left his own home in a frenzy."

"I don't know—he was only here a moment."

The father stood there trying to wring words from her, asking questions, until finally she went and leaned against the bed, covering her face with her hands. "I've told you all—everything."

"My son, Miss Bryce, my only son. If you hear, will you let me know? Will you phone at once?"

She nodded. "But I won't hear. Oh, if you would ask something that I can do. If I knew where to go—I would do anything—anything."

She saw Lee Willman lying in the hills, face down, no life in the long, slender form. Her thought revolted against the image, against the judgment that she had brought him there. Yet she turned sick with fear.

She followed Norp Willman to the door. She looked into the man's quiet, gloomy eyes: "Can I help? Do you want me with you?"

He put on his hat, pulling it down in a listless way, a thing lonely and pitiful like a great failure, about him. "No—I have searchers out—I thought you could advise me—thought he might have told his plan."

"He never said a word."

Again Chickie stood behind the closed door. She had little thought of herself, of the shame put upon her.

She saw this father, who for the first time looked old and helpless; saw him pulling on his hat in that forlorn way; saw men searching the hills. She had a wish to go out herself, climb through the brush, kneel at Lee Willman's side, speak softly.

But she could never give him back what she had taken—any more than she could return to Jimmy the full, pure sweetness of his love.

Chickie sat up that night thinking of this—thinking quietly with the fear laboring all the while in her mind. She knew that she was guiltless of luring Lee Willman. From the first moment she had told him love for her was impossible.

But he had gone on, dreaming of her, thinking her all beauty. Life had fashioned in her sweet form, the ideal he craved. He wanted it—passionately—as a child demands.

It was snatched from him in his pitiless revelation. And like a child he cried out because of his great hurt.

She said to herself, trembling: "What did I do?" and she began to walk softly in a swift, nervous agitation. "It's not my fault."

Denying it, she became more frightened—that stark image stretching pale and motionless before her.

And there kept flying into her mind the thought of escape—pack up and go. When she saw herself doing this, she was drawn back to the hills—to the form there.

At midnight she went into the hall, intending to call the police and inquire if any word had come. But Mrs. Janis was in the little sitting room reading. Chickie went back to her room.

Its dark emptiness oppressed her. If she could have walked down the hallway and listened to Jonathan snoring; or if she could have felt near her another kindly human presence.

She wished now that she had gone with Norp Willman; insisted on accompanying him—anything to avoid herself and the utter bewilderment let loose within her heart.

The morning paper had a small account of Lee Willman's disappearance. He had gone on a sketching trip, the paper said. He was an amateur artist and had left his car far up in the hills. He must have lost his way. But the searching party were hopeful of finding him before another night.

Chickie read this at breakfast in a small cafeteria. She wandered down Broadway. She kept walking, saying to herself: "Why should he die for me? I told him—why should he care that much?"

It was a soft, windless day. She reached the old quarter of the city. Mexicans in wide sombreros loafed about the an-

cient plaza; women in black shawls were hurrying to the little adobe church. Nearly all of them carried babies.

Chickie watched them; she said to herself absently: "They are going to pray."

Suddenly she turned away. She went into a store and called Norp Willman's office. He was not there. A man answered: "He is looking for his son. He will not be in."

"Have they found any trace?"

"No—nothing."

She started walking again—toward the hills. Over their massive shoulders white, luminous clouds were whirling their draperies, touched with fire.

Chickie trembled. Lee Willman might be lying out there—he might be dying. She had spoiled his dream; had marred the world for him. And his own young hurt was more than he would bear. Yet he had knelt and pressed her hand, saying how gloriously he loved her. He loved her.

Chickie knew that kind of love—love that thinks only of itself, only of its own small dreams. That young, imperious love demanding so hotly. She had suffered once because of it.

She knew now this was not love—it was the cry of self—self only. Yet she could understand it; she could be filled with pity for him, suffering it. She would have gone gladly with the dog at her heels and scoured the hills to find him.

Days passed. The notices in the paper were smaller. A rancher out in the foothills had seen such a young man. He had slept there a night and gone on.

She bought all the papers—night and morning. She spent the day waiting for them. She grew thin with suspense and worry. One afternoon, walking down Broadway, she came face to face with Eloise Maxwell. Eloise forgot her languid poses. She grabbed Chickie's arm: "Well, where in the world have you been!"

"Here and there!"

"You've quit, have you?"

"Yes."

"Where did you leave Lee?"

"What do you mean?"

Eloise tucked her arm confidentially in Chickie's: "Do you mean to say it's not true? Why, we had it all doped out that

the two of you had eloped. Rather strange he should disappear and you not show up."

Chickie's blood raced. She said almost in a gasp: "Have you heard from him? Have they found him?"

A long-drawled "Well—if you're asking me, I believe they know more than they're telling, and so do you."

Eloise gave Chickie a long, narrow scrutiny: "Why did you quit? There are several of your books and other things in the desk. Have you really left for good?"

"Yes, I've left."

"And you don't know where or why our darling Lee has vanished?"

"He may be dead, Eloise."

"Likely not. We had it figured out otherwise. Of course we count you in on it. We figure that he called for a showdown from Mrs. Potter and the old man: told them he was going to marry you. They wouldn't come through so he left in a huff. He's hot as fire, you know. He may be drowning his sorrow or he may be punishing them. Why don't you come in and get your things?"

"I will."

"Well—so long—don't grieve too much."

Chickie walked on, found herself again opposite the Old Mission church. She went over and entered the garden. At the side door of the chapel an old, furrowed Mexican woman, her skin hard and brown as soil, stretched out a lean hand. She raised imploring eyes: "Vera poor—vera poor—"

Chickie gave her a dime. She said: "May I go in?"

The old woman nodded: "Sure—sure, señorita!"

She stood in the back of the church. A young woman with clear eyes stood before a statue. The girl had a child in her arms and raised it upward. Then she bowed her head and prayed. There came such a look of faith and trust in her lowered eyes. Chickie wondered.

As the girl passed she blocked her way. She touched the baby's hand, saying: "Isn't it pretty!"

"Oh—you think so?"

"Very—are you teaching it to pray so early?"

The girl smiled: "Not too soon—I give her to Mary—Mary the Mother of God—she take care—take care of her—"

Chickie walked over and stood before the statue. It was robed quaintly in blue and white. Candles burned before it.

She looked at it a long while, seeing a sweetness, an eternal youth and sadness in the features. It moved her—ah—to feel as that girl did that a spirit leaned down from heaven and watched and cared and guarded!

She did not feel so—had not felt so in months and months. Yet suddenly she dropped on her knees. She prayed. She asked that this tragedy would not be put upon her.

It was dim within the quiet church: the candles and the flowers a soft brightness like holy smiles. The place was filled with peace.

Going out Chickie's eyes were wet. She bought a paper. There, for the first time in days and days was an item—the item she sought. . . .

CHAPTER XV

THE BRANDING

A WEEK Chickie had awaited this word. She had lived in the dread of it. Imagination tortured her with visions of a lifeless form lying face down in the shrubs. She hid from this image as from a doom. If life put his death on her hands she would be vanquished.

Now, in the blessed relief, she stood on the corner holding the paper before her, her eyes blurred, but such an uprush of joy in her heart as she had not felt in fifteen months. Like a complete and gentle absolution—like a special mercy of Providence.

Lee Willman was not dead. He would not die. So near he had come to it! Chickie didn't loiter over this. She caught the threads of hope. She was almost in tears because of the fright and terror dropping from her thoughts.

The account in the paper was evasive:

"Lee Willman, missing for the past week, has returned to his home in Pasadena, suffering from a gunshot wound, it was learned to-day. Considerable mystery surrounds the disappearance and the shooting.

"Norp Willman, oil magnate, and father of the boy, states that his son set out last Wednesday on a sketching tour. He is alleged to have lost his way in the hills and, attempting to retrace his steps, fell into a ravine. The pistol, which he habitually carried on these trips, is said to have accidentally discharged, inflicting the flesh wound in the left side. A. E. Stokes, foreman of the San Miguel ranch, who found Willman soon after the accident, was unaware of the young man's identity and of the fact that searchers were combing the hills for a trace of him.

"The physician in charge reports the wound not serious. The police have definitely abandoned their investigations."

Finishing that account, Chickie drew such a deep, audible sigh of gladness that a little woman in a white duck skirt, look-

ing at bargains in the store window, glanced up and smiled. Chickie said eagerly: "Isn't it a lovely day!"

She tucked the paper under her arm and hurried. The mad honking of automobiles; the narrow, crowded streets dazzling under their golden sun and the girls in bright sport dresses pouring from the buildings, took on a festive air. Faces seemed open and friendly. Chickie had a wish to smile at people; to thank some one because a great kindness had come to her. She wished that Mary Blake were walking at her side; that she could say: "Oh, Mary darling—if you could only know—"

At the entrance to the tunnel she stopped for a chat with old Julie selling her papers. Chickie said gayly: "Hello there, Julie! How's the luck to-day?"

Julie motioned for Chickie to wait while she made change for a blustering, excited man.

Then Julie shook her head. Immense tears rolled slowly down her cheeks. "Cora's boy has the diphtheria, Miss Chickie. She's lost two already—"

"Oh—nobody dies with diphtheria to-day, Julie. Don't you worry!"

Then Julie wanted to know if Chickie were sure, and did she think they could save the lad? Cora was her daughter . . . one of those tragic people forever followed by misfortune. Her husband was a brakeman. He had been killed. Two of her children died the following winter with the "flu." She earned her living as a janitress. She had only this one little son left her.

Chickie said: "Oh, he won't be taken . . . I'm just sure—" and she was just then so full of trust in an unseen goodness that she could have squeezed her heart and offered its thankfulness to any one who needed.

Julie wiped her eyes. "Nice in you to stop, Miss. Will you be inquiring to-morrow?"

Chickie dropped a dollar in Julie's hand and wouldn't stop for the change.

She went into the back yard and called to Wildie. He went leaping to his corner and came with the leash in his mouth. And they walked so quickly, with such a spring, that the dog perked his ears in a lordly, strutting way. He jumped up once to give her a hasty lick with his tongue.

Chickie laughed—a long, bright laugh. Wildie stopped and

began pawing with his front feet. He did this whenever he became excited.

Now his deep, shiny brown eyes were full of inquiry, as though he said: "Ho—out for a lark, are we? All right if I wag my tail?"

Chickie caught his neck and shook it. Nights and nights he had walked along, moodily, sensing her quiet, rubbing his flank against her dress. A hundred times she had been warmed by this comfort.

To-night she was touched by the selfless devotion. She ran when he pulled too hard—then she called for him to stop. They reached home breathless. For the first time she felt a lightness in her heart.

But going through the hall, she found a letter in the rack. She paused, studying the envelope, though she knew it well. It was from Norp Willman's office.

With a still foreboding she took it to her room. Enclosed was a check for the salary due her. The note was brief.

"Dear Miss Bryce—You will find herewith the money due you. I have formally to advise you that your services are no longer required.

"Very truly yours,
"Robert Lowney."

It was not the brevity of Willman's efficiency expert. It was the initials "E. M." in the corner that struck with such shame into Chickie's mind.

Eloise had typed the letter. Eloise knew Chickie had been dismissed when they met.

What else did she know? All the girls in the office were gossiping of her and Lee Willman.

They would read the papers to-night and they would have more to say.

She folded the check slowly, a little sneaking despondence wearing into her mind. She said simply: "I'll never get anywhere. I never will."

About a week after this, when Chickie was returning from a futile canvass of the employment offices, Robert Lowney crossed diagonally, stopping her about two blocks from the boarding house.

He was a severe looking man, tall and cleverly built, with

well-chiseled features. Yet he appeared cold and devoid of personality. He greeted Chickie effusively, as though the meeting were chance.

"What a pleasure to see you, Miss Bryce! By the way, have you found another position?"

Chickie flushed: "Not yet."

"I understand things are very dull. I tried to use my influence with Mr. Willman to keep you. Your work was satisfactory." He now fell in step with Chickie, smiling down at her pleasantly. "And, of course, it was unfair in him to blame you for his son's absurdity."

Chickie looked straight before her, bitterly aware of the hot stains showing on her cheeks. Did Robert Lowney know why she had been dismissed? Had Edith Potter gone to the office and made a scene? Did all the girls know?

She must find out—MUST. Almost suffocated, she asked: "Does he blame me?"

She felt rather than saw the patronizing tolerance of his downward glance.

"He knew the boy was in love with you. We all knew that. And, of course, he guessed Mrs. Potter's revelations were a great shock. Then when we learned of Lee's visit to you—"

Chickie instinctively halted. She reached out her hand. Lowney caught it—steadied her—"There, Miss Bryce, don't get excited. Are you faint? No one knows of it but I. And a thing like that is nothing in my young life. Will you come to the theater with me—say, to-night?"

She turned a white, set face toward him, answered coldly, "No, Mr. Lowney."

"To-morrow then? We could have some excellent times together, Miss Bryce. Outside of business I'm not one to pick flaws."

"Not any night, thank you!" She turned, trembling wretchedly. She ran up the steps to the boarding house.

CHAPTER XVI

OLD JULIE

She went to her room, walked about in a choking agitation. Robert Lowney knew but he wasn't one to pick flaws! He would take her to the theater! Wild tears rushed to Chickie's eyes. She need have no doubt now as to the world's attitude. She had broken the law. She had loved and brought her child here without permission.

Did she think this a slight matter? Did she think she could erect a little stone above the dead baby's grave; make up a name for it; push her own hurts far down under a valiant smile and then come back? Put out her hands to Life and say: "O, Life, it's done and past: let me try again—please?" Did she think she could reach out her hand like that as though her hands were clean?

Yes—she did. In her heart, she did. For Chickie's heart was a soft and glowing thing. It had never seen the evil of her sin as the world saw it; never felt itself all shame and degradation because of having loved. It had fine, eager pulses made for joy. They could throb yet.

So her heart had hoped, even when her mind, so deeply hurt in its young pride, was beaten. It had hoped on as vivid hearts will, but now it too was schooled; it too had learned.

. . . . . .

On the bureau sticking in the mirror was a letter from Mary. It was the first in two weeks. Mary was usually very prompt. Chickie knew that she would let the dishes go—that she sat down always the very moment and answered. So she had written Martha Blake wondering at Mary's silence.

It was explained now. Mary had a daughter. No, she hadn't spoken of it—wanted it to be a surprise. Chickie's eyes filled. She understood clearly enough. Mary was afraid to mention it—afraid to lash up memories. As though they were ever buried!

Mary said only, "She's cute, Chickie, but little Edward is very jealous. I don't know just how I should act about it. Now that I have to stay home so much, I keep wishing you were here and thinking of you.

"Jennie called yesterday. We talked and talked. She seemed just full to the lips with so many things she longed to say. She was making boudoir pillows because she saw a picture of a young girl's room in a magazine. The bed was piled with the pillows. She said to me: 'Will Chickie like them?' as though you were coming home to-morrow.

"Then Jonathan called for her. And I don't know, Chickie, but it made me feel desolate the way he took her hand and they went out together as forlorn and lost as two old blind people.

"I am hurting you—of course. But lying here in bed I am pretending to be you and figuring out how I would act. I wouldn't stay away any longer because this is only an evasion. You said something in your letter to mother that makes me sure of this. And you're only avoiding life by this absence. We can't do this—none of us.

"Chickie, old thing—I haven't a bit of pep. Mother wants to add a line—"

In Martha's clear, virile hand was this:

"My dear girl Chickie:

"You say that you live in fear of meeting some one who knows, some one who will flash everything upon you? Has this already happened? Whether it has or not you must meet it. And you must not fear it; you must not bow. This is not contrition; it is cowardice. We give power to evil when we allow it to beat us down.

"Don't you know, Chickie, that remorse is the devil's strongest weapon against his God? With it he sharpens to panic the cry of despair—the cry one gives and sinks—

"And we are not to hear this from you, dear girl. You can not let the world say what your life is going to be. Let the world have any opinion of you it will—you must be deaf to it. There's only one idea of you that counts. That's your own idea of yourself. You must walk bravely in your own thought. You know what you are. Be that so calmly, with such persistent faith, that the talk of you will falter and grow dumb before the serene, conflicting presence of you.

"Of course, you will meet rebuffs—perhaps you are meeting them—and you are not telling us who loves you. That is good. But you can't spend your life waiting for these blows. The victorious way is to come out and challenge them. It is a hard way, but you are on a hard road, Chickie, dear, no matter which fork of it you take.

"Because of all this, I wonder do you think of coming home, of meeting the issue face to face?

"Our love, and faith is yours, whatever decision you make.

"Your old friend,
"MARTHA."

Chickie read it and read it. Come home and meet the issue face to face! Ho—Martha must think she was talking to her own daughter; to Mary, who said when you love you suffer; you are glad to suffer, for you want to serve and serve!

Go home now? Well, it was cruel of them to tell her that about Jennie and Jonathan. Two old blind ones—forlorn. . . .

She fancied Jennie in her garden, stooping down over her roses . . . then the two of them eating in the kitchen. Jonathan coming in with bluff gossip. So-and-so was painting his house! High time unless he wanted the shack to fall in pieces. After that, silence—watching their plates, afraid of the pain hiding in each other's eyes.

She should go home to them—walk up the block where, arm in arm, she and Mary had whispered and wondered, the very breeze alive with mystery and music—

Would it be so hard? Harder than here with the loneliness eating like a ravenous beast at her heart?

. . . . . .

The next day, Chickie searched a gift for Mary's baby. Through her thoughts went a singing—singing of mournful voices. They filled her ears with echoes. And these dropped softly, like the first rain of winter on her heart.

She looked in a jeweler's window. A little ring or a set of pins, perhaps? Then she saw on a delicate chain seven small, glimmering pearls and fancied them resting on a baby's neck.

Mary would like that—it would be a wondrous token. Not on Mary's child but on her own Chickie saw the pearls. Little still thing lying on a table and she had gone up and touched

its lips, pressed her cheek against it, crying because its life went out in such a cold and lonely way; like a thing that no one wanted; like a thing that no one loved. She wished that she had given it some costly, beautiful thing like these pearls.

She went in and bought them. Mary would be in tears of excitement. Chickie wished to write a warm, bright note—yet she paused a long while over a sentence: "Mary darling: You thought your joy could give me pain so you didn't speak of it? But I am glad you have a little girl—"

Why should one be glad for that? Why were people so adventurous, even so happy bringing children here? If Jonathan could have looked down the years and seen his empty harvest, would he still have asked for a child? Still have poured out his heart in love?

Would any one long for a daughter if it were to have a fate like hers?

Strange how things turn out—stranger still how things are judged. Mary had a child, and every one rejoiced. Chickie had a child. For this she was now in exile; because of this a man could stop her on the street and quietly insult her. Any one who wished could point to her with scorn.

She thought of Martha's words—walk bravely in her own calm faith; be deaf to the world's opinion that it might not beat her down.

Easier to write that than to follow it.

. . . . . .

Days passed, as they will, whether or not hearts are breaking. She found no job. She substituted, sometimes being called but twice in a week. She thought with yearning of Mary—of her mother—most of all of Jonathan—

She thought too of Lee Willman. She would stand at her window these winter afternoons watching the massy gray clouds thronging over the mountain tops—she would see his ardent young eyes when he said so adoringly, "Oh, you dear, beautiful angel—you're the Golden Girl! I had no dream until you gave it to me."

She wondered if she had done him such a wrong. Had he the right to demand so much from life? To expect a perfect and stainless gift? To fling up despondent hands because he was denied? He hadn't cared or paused even to consider her suffering.

Did he think of her? Or only of himself and his stark disillusion?

Chickie too had been awakened. Most bitterly. She too had demanded full, sweet gifts—Love must come in glory. As though her happiness were a great concern of God's.

Now she understood. Each but a faint murmur in the great song of life. She could raise her voice in strong, brave chords—or she could slink away, whimpering because the tune was hard to carry. Singing her part or mute, the song would thunder on—only she, the loser, for her silence.

She and those two waiting and hoping.

. . . . . .

She got up early Sunday morning, walked in a blithe, marching sun down West Third and through the tunnel. She wanted the Sunday papers. It occurred to her that she would find a job—that it would be a good one. She walked clear to the tunnel to buy her paper from old Julie.

Julie wasn't there. The conductor who stood at the incline, selling tickets for the crazy little car that climbed in an almost perpendicular path over the tunnel, answered Chickie's inquiry: "Julie? Bumped last night by an automobile—taken to the hospital."

Oh, sure! He guessed she was dead, all right—old bones are brittle.

Chickie bought her paper from a little Mexican boy. She took the car for Santa Monica because this was the quietest of all the beaches and to her the most beautiful. There was one white house set in a broad green lawn, right across the street from the glorious old ocean. There were long rows of these houses but this one had an air about it—self-possessed and serene. Chickie always walked past it. She wondered what sort of people lived within and if they always came out of an evening to see the sun plunge redly in the waters.

As soon as Wildie saw the waves he tugged at his leash. He was ready for a run. Chickie sat on a stone bench and read the ads. She kept thinking of the hulky, gentle old woman, doubled almost in two—yet ready to bless the world benignly if an extra penny dropped to her hand.

There were only three ads calling for expert service and offering to pay a "good salary to the right party." Chickie pictured in her mind what these jobs were like—how her days

would pass if one of them were given her; the routine from nine to five, the return to the boarding house for dinner, a walk; hours of reading—then bed.

And if she were lucky and kept the job this would go on years and years until she became colorless; with a piping, cheerful voice—another Miss Cheesman.

And on this glowing Sunday morning, with a myriad jewels sparkling on the waters, a white cloud sailing like a bird and winter dropping a red-gold beauty on the city's imperial wall of hills—on this day, with a touch of buoyance in her thoughts, Chickie wanted more—more than this. Hard to think of yourself always and always alone.

Mary was right. This wasn't living. This was just avoiding life; dwelling within herself; giving no joy to a single, single other.

She got up suddenly and called to Wildie. Why, even Jake said she'd have to do better than that.

It occurred to her with a thrill that she would visit Julie. Poor old thing—she'd expect that much.

Bent, grotesque figure, whose aspect prompted even the thoughtless to wonder why she should live on and on while everywhere the young and happy were taken.

Odd that this battered fragment should forge the link between Chickie and a new if deeper, harder life.

CHAPTER XVII

OTHER HEARTS

Old Julie didn't die. And Chickie didn't get a job. But she made a friend.

This was the nurse on duty in the ward where Julie lay—Eva Chase, a big, soft, garrulous body with a nice moonface and a slipshod manner.

Chickie was immensely fascinated by Eva's knowledge and the seeming unbounded wealth of Eva's experience. Eva, for her part, was secretly flattered by Chickie's wistful admiration.

They became friends after Chickie's third visit. Eva was going off duty. They walked down the corridor together.

It was quite a mystery to several of the nurses—the relationship of this pretty, well-dressed girl to the brown, gnarled old news dealer. Eva saw Julie's eyes light with joy the first time Chickie entered; saw the old woman hold fast to Chickie's hand, mumbling and pulling her down till Chickie kissed her lips.

Eva wondered at this. She asked very adroitly. Learning the truth she plumped her hands on her hips: "My God! What would you do if it were your cook? Or your groceryman? I suppose you'd go into mourning."

Chickie answered: "Well, she's a dear old soul and always says 'God bless ye.' That counts when you're quite alone. Perhaps you don't know the queer, trailing ache that goes along with you when you don't know a soul and walk blocks and blocks, never seeing a single familiar face—"

"I don't, don't I? Well, that queer old ache's been trailing me a good year now—"

This was their first bond. They found others. Chickie said she was interested in hospitals and would just love to go through one.

It was a Sunday afternoon, the week after Julie's accident, that Eva took her through the wards and laboratories. Each white, drawn face, flat against the pillows, made Chickie's heart

bound. There was an old man sitting bolt upright, horror and the pitiful aloneness of the dying in his eyes. His hands worked at the blankets.

In another ward, a little fellow, seven or eight, sandy haired and game as a veteran, grinned when Eva passed: "Jiminy, feel good to-day—" The appeal of the young, frightened eyes, the way the small, square hand lay so inert made Chickie turn her head. In the corridor she sneaked a handkerchief to her eyes. Eva gave a gentle, mocking look: "Tough, isn't it? Soon get used to it. I'll give you a real thrill now."

They entered a long, narrow room with some half dozen beds—a bright, cheery place. The patients were women and girls of various ages. They had an air of well being, even of satisfaction. One or two were reading; another embroidered. There was a pretty girl about twenty with a boudoir cap of lace and ribbons. She lay charmingly against the pillows talking in a soft dramatic manner to two girl friends. They listened as to some wildly absorbing tale. Eva whispered with a touch of good natured irony: "Swapping horrors. She's giving all the details of her frightful agony, the tale that never grows old. . . ."

They were in the maternity ward, but Chickie didn't know this. She said: "Nobody here seems dying. Where's the thrill?"

"Look over in the corner—"

The first thing Chickie saw was a pair of black eyes, brilliant as stars, then a mass of dark, glossy curls. It seemed the head and forehead of a very young, beautiful boy. Then the patient turned, half sitting up and resting on an elbow. Not a boy, but a little, slim girl, who seemed about fifteen and whose mouth and short, resolute chin gave her a look stoical and defiant, like that sometimes seen on children who have been whipped, but not convinced.

Eva said: "We're just in time—" for at that moment a nurse brought in a bundle wrapped in a blanket and laid it on the bed at the girl's side.

Chickie's face grew pale. She said, trembling: "Not hers, is it?"

"Who's do you suppose?"

"Oh—she just seemed so terribly young. I'd never suppose she was married—"

"Sorry part of it. She isn't. Want to see it?"

Chickie yanked her collar, for she was suddenly warm and breathing hard. "No! No, Eva! She won't want us staring."

Eva said: "She's fond of me," and, walking down the long aisle, stooped over the girl with a warm: "Get's sweeter every day, Elena. How are you?"

The girl had the baby hugged against her, she was looking down at it, pressing its hand on her breast. Her cheeks colored when Eva spoke, but she didn't smile at all. When Eva said: "Let us see it—" she glanced suspiciously at Chickie, hesitated, but finally turned it a little, opening the blanket.

Oh—it was much bigger than Chickie's baby. It had hair, too—black and curly. But it wasn't a little, unprotesting thing with scarce a flicker to call its life. It was ruddy and plump. Suddenly, opening its mouth, it yawned mightily.

Something in that twisting of its lips struck along Chickie's nerves. She had an overpowering wish to sink on her knees, hide her face against the child's. She touched the baby's hand. She leaned down, whispering to the girl, "It's lovely." The girl saw into Chickie's eyes. They were brimming. She said impulsively: "You can kiss him."

Then Chickie walked unsteadily to the corridor where Eva waited. The large, easy face had a twinkle: "Stay out of hospitals in future if you can't do any better than that—"

Chickie was unable to answer. She was seeing one who forged against a beating wind, head down; one who stooped suddenly and laid a still form on the ground.

Ah—if the child had lived; if it were with her now; if she had it to guard; it to raise against the world's protest? She stopped abruptly and wiped her face. She murmured: "Eva—what becomes of a child like that?"

Eva shrugged: "Peddled about, mostly. Sometimes they're adopted."

"They leave them here? How can they do that?"

"It's the only thing to do, isn't it?"

Chickie's hands were clammy. She rubbed her handkerchief in a ball between them. "Is it? But that girl seems to want it."

"There's the thrill for you. She does want it. They hardly ever do. She's going to take it. It's hers. We can't stop her. You can see what she's walking into, can't you—a girl of sixteen with a child—no home—no job."

Eva told the girl's story. Elena Castenada belonged to an old Spanish family. The girls were all pretty and full of fire. They were poor but stern and proud. One of the sisters was married and living near San Gabriel.

At fifteen Elena came from Santa Barbara, where she had been raised, to Los Angeles, getting a job as alteration hand in a department store.

She fell in love. No one knew the man. And no threat of disowning or disgrace could force his name from the girl, Elena.

When the married sister found out she offered to take Elena in if she would get rid of the child. If Elena would leave the baby, the sister would allow her to live in her home. The girl refused so that now she wouldn't even turn her face from the wall when her sister came to visit. She was afraid they would steal the baby—she was even suspicious that the nurses might give it away while she slept.

Chickie felt weak and almost unable to breathe. She said faintly: "I suppose she has some money saved—"

"Oh—you do! Altering ladies' gowns is very profitable to the apprentice—"

"If she hasn't, what is she to do?"

"Sad life, isn't it?"

"You don't suppose they'll allow her to leave the hospital, not knowing what is to become of her?"

"When they leave—they leave! We haven't any follow-up squad. What do you think this is? A prison?"

Chickie said hoarsely: "It's not right—we can't stand by and do nothing."

Eva stood on the steps: "That's just what we can do. And nothing else. There are two or three a month like Elena. Can't help them all, can you? What good does it do to help one?"

Chickie was as weighted with this forbidding fate awaiting Elena Castenada as though it were her own. She saw the pathetic, beautiful youngness of the girl's face; the childish pride when she said: "You can kiss him!"

It seemed to her frightful that she and Eva would stand with folded hands and allow Elena to go out into this brutal aloneness. It seemed to her that she was a hundred years older in poise and confidence.

And it was bitter enough for her. She went along the street,

stumbling, biting her lips. That night she didn't sleep. Her thoughts filled with quixotic schemes for aiding.

She would send an anonymous letter to Elena with $100 of the $250 she had in the bank. Or she would rent the vacant room upstairs and ask Mrs. Janis to let Elena come.

Then she would get a job. Why—she would support her for a while. She was carried away with the reckless fervor. Oh—her own trouble was not as awful as this—older—six years older—how tragic life can be—

Monday morning Chickie got up before six. She had pasted on a card three ads. And one of these she was certain was going to be her job—and a peach of a job—

CHAPTER XVIII

FLOTSAM

BEFORE 9 o'clock Monday morning Chickie waited in the small, gray-papered office of Jones & Jones, attorneys. She had read this ad with a glow of hope.

Three applicants were ahead of her. One was a plump, blonde girl in a pink sport suit and a large picture hat trimmed with pansies; then there was, very rigid against the wall, a tailored business person, one of those women who are thirty-five at twenty, and still thirty-five at fifty; the third was a slim midget with a neat air and very knowing, eager face.

Chickie, pretending to read a book, surveyed these rivals anxiously and found them surveying her.

A girl with drab hair and nostrils so wide it gave her whole face a greedy aspect, now opened the door to an inner office. She motioned to the applicant in the picture hat.

The girl flushed, looking very young and alluring. Chickie thought: "She won't get it—why did she wear such a hat—but it's so warm here—"

She had scarcely time to finish this brief judgment when the girl swept back to the room, her cheeks scarlet. She made a bolt for the outer door. The same thing happened to the midget, only she returned with a grin from ear to ear.

The severe applicant was called. A long moment elapsed. Chickie was allowed to apply. "Miss Hatchet," as Chickie christened her predecessor, sat vigorously at a table taking dictation from a flustered, unhappy-looking man while directly facing the door, behind a small railing, was a straight featured woman with a wide mouth literally crammed with very long, heavy teeth. She watched as Chickie entered, then reached for a pencil stuck in her hair: "Your name? You've had experience in legal work? No? Sorry, you won't do."

No courteous: "We may give you a chance. You may hear from us." No "sit and rest yourself a bit." Not a word. Chickie walked unsteadily to the door.

In the hall the midget waited for the elevator. She burst

into a laugh at the sight of Chickie: "You, too! What a scream! I suppose the fright gets it."

Chickie said whimsically: "Sweet and gracious, wasn't it? I never was bounced out on my ear like that before."

"Perhaps it's your first experience with a jealous wife. She's the Joneses of the firm. The husband is the 'and.' I knew what to expect, but I thought I was inoffensive enough to get by. They say she throws a fit if he even looks at a pretty girl. I should worry with a dollar in my purse! Do you need the job?"

"In a way—yes."

"Tough luck. I've laid off all summer; and that's the only one worth looking up—"

"Oh—I saw another—"

"I'd like to bet it's the one that said, 'must have personality plus, also initiative.'"

"Yes."

"I'll say you need the plus, all right, to sell their fake oil units. That's the job. I went there last week. Well—so long. I'll have a little more vacation."

Chickie was a little dismayed with this breezy dismissal of her chances. But it was a fine, amber day. The air was full of sweetness and there was still the third ad.

She walked through the shopping district, stopping for a brief, caressing glance at the wondrous colors of evening gowns newly imported. The shops here fascinated her, especially that one that had such a summery air, with birds in cages, so that when you entered a flash of song and a dart of yellow met you.

The address was blocks beyond this. Her buoyance sank as she reached the street piled with fruit boxes; crates of vegetables, of squawking chickens stacked at the curbs. She went on to the middle of the block, breathing gingerly.

At the address she had marked, an enormous butcher dray was now parked and two men lifted out whole beeves, lambs and pigs, slinging them over their shoulders. Drips of red went down slowly, smudging the sidewalk. Chickie gulped, taking in the raw, fleshy odor, but she followed the men into the darkened area. They hung the meat.

In a corner on a small platform was a door with the glass painted white and "Office" written black and large. Chickie almost ran to it, more in the hope of getting a free breath than from any eagerness to begin work in these surroundings.

A thin man in a sack coat, who looked more like a discouraged, underfed preacher than a wholesale butcher, admitted her. He said: "Well—you come about the ad—I can't exactly say—" He seemed very uncomfortable. In the corner, just hanging her coat on a hook, was a poor looking, sallow girl. She eyed Chickie, almost with appeal, brushed a heavy bottle fly that kept circling about her head.

Finally the man said: "But you might leave your name and address. Miss Nelson isn't sure she can do the work."

The sallow girl sat very still, her eyes glued on a notebook. There was something dramatic and hopeless in her quiet. Chickie's ready imagination took fire. She said on a sudden impulse: "I couldn't do the work at all. I've never had experience. I'd rather not consider it."

She went out quickly, scarcely pausing till she was well into the breeze and sunlight again. It surprised her to find her nerves quivering. Jobs like that—fill up your lungs with heavy, odorous breaths—get your feet in those red smudges on the sidewalk? She was glad Miss Nelson seemed to want the place so wretchedly.

Well—that was the last of the list. Another week of idleness. Chickie swung her purse. It wasn't going to last. Why—it couldn't! Plenty of work—

She went to the bank and drew out $100 in currency. She had a breathless, choky feeling doing this. Yet she felt herself very tall, very friendly even to the clerk who slipped the bills across the counter.

Riding out to the hospital she wondered how she should offer this money to Elena Castenada; wondered if the girl would resent her efforts? She would have! If any one had come to her and said: "I know of a nice room, you can stay as long as you like." If any one had said that to her she would have turned cold as steel. She would have smiled and thanked them so that they would be filled with mortification.

But she was different from Elena. Chickie knew this. She was young enough—yes. But for that thing she did, she and she only was responsible. She would allow no other to be held accountable, for this would have trailed it all in unbearable shame. Her own heart; her own spirit—swept though it might have been more by the sacrificial urge of a girl's first love than by its own wild wish—had yet poured itself out freely and of its own spontaneous prompting. This was its

one justification. She would have burned to hear herself catalogued as "betrayed."

But this Elena was a child. And it was different having no home to go to and not so much as the money to buy her dinner. Chickie had never been desperate like that.

She grew excited and more impatient and fervid than in the night.

Eva was just dressing to go on duty. She turned with lazy surprise when Chickie walked into her room. She said cheerfully: "Well, woman—I thought you were job seeking to-day."

Chickie answered without introduction: "I want you to get this to that Elena. Will you?"

Eva stared at the crumpled notes Chickie had thrust in her hand: "You must be out of your mind. If you've got so much spare change—"

"You can tell her that it's the custom of the hospital. And I know a room—"

"Well—hold on a bit. I think she was to leave to-day."

Chickie trembled. Then she grew angry: "I told you I wanted to do this—"

"Well—wait a minute—we'll see." Eva went on with her dressing, saying with a long drawl: "You're awfully foolish. After she spends this she'll still have the problem to meet—"

"If she comes and stays where I am—well—what about that—it would be easier . . ."

Eva shrugged: "I've never tried the guardian angel rôle but I don't think too much of it—"

She was ready at last. As they went up to the ward, Chickie said brusquely, "Get a move on, Eva!"

Elena's bed was freshly made—unoccupied. Eva lifted her shoulders. "I'll ask at the office."

At the office the girl said: "Oh, yes—she went out around 11. No—no one was with her except the baby—I don't know where. She didn't give any address."

CHAPTER XIX

UPWARD OR DOWN?

Eva said: "You might as well forget her. She's on her way."

Chickie answered: "Yes."

But for days she thought of Elena. She kept seeing the young eyes, frightened yet defiant as the girl walked down the steps of the hospital, carrying her baby.

Where had she gone? Would any one offer her a place? What was going to become of her? What became of the dozens who were like her and went out into the world with the same hopeless burden?

Could they stand up against it? Oh—how? And it seemed now to Chickie that the whole world ached with pain that was as great as hers. But no one cared; no one bothered to relieve it.

Now, passing a young girl with a baby, she stared at them. She thought pityingly: "Oh, you, too?"

It was a Saturday afternoon two weeks later. Chickie had been working as substitute with an insurance company. Eva came to lunch. She said: "Remember that little Spanish girl, the one who had the baby? I know where she is."

Chickie wouldn't rest till Eva agreed to go with her and visit the girl.

The house was one of the ancient adobes still clinging to the outskirts of the old plaza. They went up a hill where the one-story mud places stood on three sides of a neglected garden and clotheslines stretched from house to house.

A lean woman dry and brown answered their knock. She became instantly excited and poured out a staccato tirade in broken English when they asked for Elena Castenada.

"You like see Lena? I dunno. She go. Go las' week! No good for me. Come here, bring baby, eat mucho! No money! Not pay one peso! Every day, oh, she goin' getta job! Oh, sure! Mañana have plenty." The woman shook out her blue calico apron: "Mañana no good! I send her out."

She shut her lips obstinately after this explanation and leaned against the door with her bony arms folded.

Chickie looked beyond her into a dark, narrow room, with an earthen floor. But it was clean and the bed in the corner had pillow slips with a deep fringe of Spanish lace.

A baby about a year old was sitting on the floor sucking an enormous hunk of Italian bread. Chickie thought she would win the woman and began to talk gently to the youngster: "Hello, little fellow—who gave you those pretty eyes? Come over here." The mother was entirely indifferent.

Then Eva said: "You had no right to turn her out!" Eva mentioned the police. It was like a torch to gunpowder.

No right! Nice talk! But the woman had her own children—eight of them to feed. Last Saturday her husband lose his job! Then she get mad! She say to Elena—go!

The drift of her outburst was this—Elena had come to her two weeks ago. She had promised to pay $8 a week. For this the woman would give her board and room and watch the child while Elena worked. She had gone out every day, but she had got no job. She had paid no money. And she had been allowed to stay a week. Then she was told to go.

Elena went, but late that night they found her sleeping on the porch. She had taken clothes from the line and wrapped them about the baby and herself. So they push her! They push her out—

Whether they did this then or waited till the morning, the woman refused to state. Anyway the girl was gone. And they didn't know where.

The woman finished contemptuously: "I dunno! What you think? I follow her?"

Eva said simply, "Well, that's all then."

She and Chickie walked blocks after that. Neither of them spoke. Finally Eva said, "So ends chapter one."

Chickie's nerves were hot and all on edge. Yes—chapter one. Any one could guess what other chapters in that life would be. The world expected the girl to go down. It waited cynically for this.

It came to Chickie with a shock that in this judgment she and Elena were the same—that she, too, was given up by the world as one of the "lost." She had never considered herself in this light before. She thought of it with a shamed, hot resentment. The world was, of course, mistaken in her.

That night there was a letter from Mary. Toward the end Mary wrote: "You've never answered a word to the most important question I've asked in months. Surely you must think of it, Chickie—surely, you must think of coming home. Oh, you'll have to sooner or later. I think it would be a truly glorious thing to do."

Chickie's heart thumped. And then she became suspicious. Why was Mary harping on this? Was anything the matter with Jonathan? With Jennie?

Glorious thing to do! And everywhere she turned have people whisper, "Look, there goes Chickie Bryce!"

And if Chickie smiled, if she seemed ever glad: "Well! Brazen, isn't she?"

Wildie was stretched regally before her chair near the window. Now, as she stood at the table, he kept opening his eyes and regarding her, then shutting them lazily. She said: "Ho, dog! They think I should go home. And that would be very glorious—"

The mere prospect daunted her. No. She was doing all she could. All that any one should ask.

She fell asleep that night with smarting, resentful tears in her eyes. Mary might talk! Indeed!

But in the morning she wakened uneasy and depressed. Mary must have some reason for her insistence.

Then Chickie grew afraid . . . and reading Mary's letter again, every line became an accusation. Chickie had run away. She didn't need to think she was making any kind of a fight. She'd just left the two old ones there to bear it all.

Mary's letter ended like this: "I suppose you think I might mind my own business, but I just won't be able to bear it, Chickie, if, when the time comes, you let yourself take the easier way—"

What did Mary mean by that? Chickie pondered it over her breakfast and over the long walk she took Sunday morning with Wildie. Coming back to the boarding house she thought: "They'll be alone again the holidays. Christmas last year they were alone—"

Coming into the house, Mrs. Janis met her. She said in a flushed way: "A gentleman in the parlor."

Chickie stepped back toward the door: "Who?" and then in a hushed whisper: "Say that I'm gone for the day—"

Then a step; then Wildie giving a thunderous bark, then a

sweeping of giant arms and Jonathan's old face pressed down on hers; Jonathan's deep voice chuckling—saying tender foolish things:

"Your old dad, Chickie girl! What—crying—come now!" and raising her chin in his palms, looking a long, long while in her brimming eyes. Till finally she drew his rough head down and cried with all her heart against his neck.

And couldn't look at him at all—darling, darling Jonathan—oh, he couldn't stand it any longer? Oh, it was hard—was it—ah— She felt a thousand melting tears rush through her veins. They made her heart so full—so bursting full—

All this time, quivering—dabbing at her eyes, Jennie sat in the parlor. What—Jennie, too? Come all this way? Why, of course! Didn't they have a car? Nice little honeymoon for Jennie. Jonathan was the boy to show her the sights. Indeed, now!

Jennie only reached Chickie's neck. The soft, gentle hands wound about her. Jennie's lips moved, but she couldn't say a single word. She just kissed Chickie again and again. She just kept patting Chickie's face.

Chickie felt a strange, golden warmth, as though Life were rushing again radiantly through every pulse, as though there were a heart and a glad spirit uppermost again. She tried to say this to Jonathan, but the words got mixed with tears. He laughed at her and at the mother: "You two silly girls! Why, Jennie up and cried the whole way down."

Chickie said: "Oh, it's lovely here. I'll show you every blessed thing. You'll stay and stay—oh, a long, long time?"

She saw Jennie's hand go swiftly up and hide her face. She saw that hand tremble. Jonathan said, swinging his shoulders: "Now—mother—mother!"

And in a flash Chickie knew that her testing had come.

CHAPTER XX

SACRIFICE

They came to her, those two, because she was the only thing they had, and they could no longer let her go this lone, blind way. They wanted her back in the cottage; they wanted her voice in their ears.

They never said a word of this, but it was in their full, warm looks and in the catch so often at their throats. They had no thought to weight the cross she carried. But this was what they did.

All the time she knew it, yet all the while she laughed. For it was merry, the three of them jaunting here and there, and, just think, eight months since they'd even seen each other. She walked along, holding fast to Jonathan's arm, touched, yet glad, because he strutted so—proud old fellow.

Jennie said to her timidly, "You're just as pretty, Chickie, dear."

But Jennie seemed littler than ever. Her face had a thin, white look, though now it was forever flushed because of her great excitement. Little Jennie, who had never stepped into the Palace, who would have been frightened to the heart entering the Fairmont, must now go here and there, sit in lobbies, ride up mountains, eat in restaurants—she who had cooked every meal she had tasted in well nigh thirty years. She was more flurried than a girl.

Once for dinner Jonathan ordered steak, specially prepared. It came on with mashed potatoes running like a white ribbon around the edge and bananas fried in the gravy. Why—Jennie couldn't believe it—a steak cooked like that. She touched the waiter's sleeve, almost coquettish in her eagerness—"Now could he get her the recipe for that?"

Another time they had lunch at the Alexandria, for Jonathan meant to blow them to the skies and boasted of it. Jennie's eyes were everywhere. She gave Chickie a gentle tap with her foot under the table, saying in a shocked awe: "I see

men with rouge on their lips." When Chickie told her they were movie actors who had probably just finished a scene, Jennie's eyes got round and bulgy. She sat up stiffly and beamed: "Real movie people! And to see them face to face! Watch them eat; hear them laughing and talking—well now—"

They took the room in the boarding house that Chickie had wanted for Elena Castenada. In the mornings Chickie combed her mother's hair as she used to do on Sundays. Then Jennie talked. She seemed just starved for this intimate, small gossip that is such a relish to a woman's soul and so meaningless to a man's.

For instance, there was the voile waist—such a bargain. Jennie was standing in line at 9 o'clock Friday morning—dollar day, you know. She was the first one there and, think of it, the salesgirl was so sweet, she picked her out the very prettiest. And in a whisper told that it had been marked down from two ninety-five and was the only one they had!

Jonathan had dismissed that peerless triumph with a mere chuckle; just saying Jennie was pretty smart and that was why he married her. But she wanted to talk hours about it.

There were other things, too, that Jennie wanted to discuss. She had longed and longed to know, but that time eight months ago she had been afraid to ask. One morning as Chickie brushed up all those stray wispy locks with a small brush dipped in bandoline, Jennie said: "Are you happy, Chickie dear?"

"Oh—I suppose I am . . ."

"Are you pining for anything?"

Chickie's throat tightened: "No—no, I'm not."

Then softly: "Chickie, did that boy ever offer to come and marry you?"

It was eloquent of their faith in her that they never doubted who the man might be. The day after the inquest Jonathan had said only this—and she had shivered at the ominous, steely quiet of his tone—he had said: "I want you to answer me the truth, Chickie girl—do you want to marry that lad?"

She answered, not raising her eyes: "No—oh, no; I don't."

"Thank God for that! I wouldn't want to give my girl to such a one! But if you want him—if that will make it easier, he'll come out here. Be sure of that!"

She didn't say to Jonathan that he was even then in the city. Nor did she ever say that he was married.

Now—putting a pin slowly in Jennie's meager twist of hair she said, trying to speak lightly: "I didn't want him, mother."

"But did he go away and leave you, knowing of it?"

"No—he didn't know—"

"And didn't you ever let him know—didn't you ever ask him to come back—"

Chickie shut her eyes. After a moment she repeated: "I didn't want him, mother."

This was more than Jennie would ever understand. Yet, at the last, it was the truth. Jennie said: "I thought you were waiting down here to give him a chance. And you would come back to us then with it all righted—"

Ho—righted! Such old fashioned, book ideas as Jennie had. Hide behind a name—truckle to the world like that! They would say it was all right then, would they? They would pat her on the back?

No man would right this wrong! Indeed not! She had gone down alone. If she came back—it would also be alone.

She said that to Jennie, smiling, but her heart quick and smarting.

Jennie's face turned red. She looked at her worn hands: "Why don't you come then, Chickie, dear? Mary keeps wondering all the time if you're coming. She's longing to have you back."

The way she said it Chickie knew that it was Jennie who wondered and longed.

"I can't come yet—I can't."

"Do you mean that you aren't coming at all, Chickie? You don't want to be with us?"

"Oh, it's not that, mother. It's so many things—"

On two or three mornings after this Jonathan went sneaking off after breakfast and didn't return till noon. The fourth morning he took the two of them with him, a grave importance in his look. He kept saying: "Perk up now, Miss Jennie!" But he wouldn't tell where they were going.

They drove out and out till the houses became scarce and only here and there was a rose climbing over a porch. They seemed flying to the very heart of the distant blue hills.

Chickie whispered: "He wants you to see where all the millionaires live in white stone houses with gardens marching straight back to the mountains."

Jennie smiled. But she kept her eyes before her, and she

wasn't flurried or excited at all to-day. She kept pressing nervously at her lips with her fingers.

They took a turn to the right, away from the foothills, away from the lofty homes. They went down a block neat with small bungalows. They passed this and came to the very outskirts of Alhambra.

Here Jonathan stopped, took a long breath. "Now isn't this air fine, girls? Take a breath of it, Jennie."

The street was quiet. There were three little houses. One was white, its garden flaming with dahlias. An old woman sat on the little front porch making lace. Next to this was a gray cottage. It was vacant and overgrown with weeds.

Jonathan swung the front iron gate. "Let's take a look." He had a key to the door.

Chickie noticed then that her mother's neck was moist. The way the hair straggled down seemed all at once pathetic.

And she thought of Mary's letter. "Oh—if you choose the easier way—" So this was the reason Mary wrote, was it?

Jonathan called to her. "Step in here, young lady. Now, isn't this fine. And look here—cabinets in the kitchen, Jennie. Why, with a few coats of paint, won't we be shining, though?"

Jennie leaned her hands on the sink. She tried valiantly to smile. She ran her finger along the enamel. She said, "Oh, there is a chip here—"

Chickie said, "You didn't buy this place, Jonathan?"

He swung his shoulders. He opened the back porch, marched them down to the yard. They could hardly find the path because of the dry, grassy weeds. But wait—wait till Jennie planted roses here and there! And a magnolia tree and orange blossoms!

"How about that, Jennie?"

She stooped down and pulled up a purple thistle. "It will take a long time."

Suddenly she turned to Chickie, her lips shaking. "It's nice, isn't it? You think it's as nice as our own, do you?"

There was a kind of wild appeal in Jennie's look. Oh, the years and years of love that had gone into Jennie's garden—the years and years of gentle memories. The house was a living thing and the roots of these two old ones struck deep beneath it—deep as the roots of the ancient lilac tree. Lilac trees take long to bloom. Jennie loved that one of hers.

And was this dingy, weed-grown place as nice?

Jonathan came over and put his arm about the mother. He said: "You like it, Jennie?"

In the faintest, gentlest voice she answered: "Oh, yes—"

She didn't say a word riding home. She took off her gloves and rubbed her hands together. Finally she looked at Chickie, wiping a great tear from her eyes: "We'll all be together again."

Chickie's heart was mute.

CHAPTER XXI

THE RETURN

SHE went to Jonathan that night. She took the watch from his pocket and studied it. The old dial was yellowed with much ticking of the hours. She looked up into her father's face and smiled: "Very smart, old fellow, aren't you? You think you'll be after poking Jennie and myself out there in a garden of weeds, do you?"

"Don't you like that little place, Chickie?"

"I don't. I'm agin you on it—"

His look was very sober: "You don't want us down here with you?"

"You haven't bought it yet—oh, really, have you?"

"It's about as good as settled. To-morrow—"

"I thought you came to take me really home. I thought you wanted me back there."

He raised her face and searched it. She kept her eyes straight, glancing into his, murmuring wistfully: "And you did come for that, Jonathan darling? You think I should go with you?"

"Perhaps I ask too much, Chickie girl—"

She looked down then, trembling, pressing against his shoulder: "Then you better take me back. I guess you better."

Hours later, after Jennie was asleep, he tapped softly at Chickie's door. For a long while she had been sitting in the dark, looking at the sky and all the many silver stars, and, oh, there seemed such music, such immortal peace in this blue, far distant space. Her eyes blinked coming back to the light and the crowding walls.

Jonathan said: "Are you sure you want to do this, Chickie?"

She was weak with thinking of it and with the storm of pictures tossing through her mind. She answered: "But I should. I know I should."

He took her in his arms and kissed her.

So she went with them. They drove along the coast; saw the waves lash up against the rocks; saw them ripple mildly on the sands. And Jennie watched her all the time.

"You're very pale, Chickie, dear."

"The wind blows off the rouge, I guess."

"You're not afraid; you're not regretting?"

"Why, no. What makes you ask?"

Wildie crouched against her knees. He licked her hands. Now she stooped down and caught his neck, shaking it a little. He reared and licked her face.

He was in no hurry, that Jonathan. Stop at Santa Barbara and see the old Mission—yes, climb up its ancient turret; touch those bells of bronze that a long century ago rang out their call to prayer. And it was answered from the circling mountains to the sunset sea.

How quiet all that past! How sunk beneath the marching days! Chickie's eyes went from the barren hills, so noble in their nakedness, to the sunny gardens, where the hearts of yesterday lay silenced in their tombs. Oh, the peace and sweetness of the years that pass with tufted feet upon a grave!

Yet, in that distant time were those who suffered, thinking that their pain would never end; thinking it too great to bear. As she thought now.

This fancy touched her. There may have been a girl some hundred years ago who climbed these very steps; who looked across the hills and wept because her life seemed done. All forgotten now. Chickie smiled. Well—perhaps it didn't matter much if one or another found the going hard; perhaps one shouldn't look within so much—

That journey back to the home she had left in such forlorn despair eight months ago had many freighted moments. Once, sitting in the front with Jonathan, he gave her a proud, mighty look. He said with a chuckle, "My girl, eh?" Her heart leaped to the challenge.

But when the lower bay stretched out before them and the sharp tang of the city's breath was in her mouth, Chickie sat upright, a hammering on every nerve. Jennie whispered, "Would you rather wait till dark, Chickie dear?"

Jonathan heard that. He said quietly, "No, we're driving in now." He stopped the car and motioned Chickie to the front with him. He straightened taller than before, so that he towered massively above the wheel. Chickie gave a soft, uneasy laugh. "Are you having a brass band to meet me, Jonathan?"

"And I would have if I'd thought in time."

It was plain enough what Jonathan expected, and she would have to stand on her toes to measure up to that. And she would have to fight as she had not fought before.

When they reached Mission Street he just went sauntering—give them all a chance to see.

"And, mind you, look about and smile—that's the way!"

She sat straight enough, but when they nosed along Twenty-fourth and went turning into Fair Oaks she whispered, trembling, "Hurry—oh, just a little."

"Shucks now, Chickie, girl! Is all the world thinking of you?"

Just the same, it was hard to keep from shaking when they passed the Blakes' old gray house, and there was the breath of heaven and the stunted palm; then down to the cottage, so white and gleaming now—new curtains at the windows.

She said again, "Hurry, hurry!" and wanted to rush in and close the door, swift and fast.

When Jonathan took his time finding the key she was almost at the breaking point. He said: "Close your eyes, Chickie; Jennie's got surprises here."

When she stepped into her own room she didn't need to close her eyes. Tears blinded them. Why they'd made the house all over for her coming. Why, they'd built new things about, and the room wasn't the same at all.

That window that used to look on Jennie's roses was gone and in its place were doors—long French doors. They opened to another room, all sun and flowers and birds in cages, and wicker chairs and a wicker desk.

Jennie came padding up, wiping at her cheeks. She stared inquiringly at Chickie's face, saying to Jonathan: "I guess she likes it! I guess she's pleased."

All this they'd done for her! No wonder Jennie trembled, plucking that thistle in an old yard full of weeds.

They made her say again and again if she liked it; if she was glad about it; if this wasn't better now than being all alone—

Even the kitchen was changed, with a new, white sink and a shiny drainboard and cabinets freshly built and painted.

Some one had been about the house that morning, for there were flowers everywhere—gaudy autumn flowers all red and gold.

Chickie said: "Does Mary know?"

Yes—Mary knew. Mary could hardly wait until they'd let her come. She came running up the back steps and, before Chickie knew it, they were in each other's arms. Mary cried—then she held Chickie off and looked at her. Why—not even a freckle! And thin as ever—the luck of it! But she couldn't so much as taste a chocolate cream! Oh—and Martha Blake wanted Chickie to run down a moment—yes—now—she had tea all ready—

Mary linked her arm in Chickie's as though they were two girls again and all of life before them. Wildie trotted along at Chickie's side, barking with excitement.

Chickie said: "My knees are shaking. Tell me, Mary—I can feel them all at the windows."

"No—they're not. You should worry! Let them have their stares. They'll soon get tired."

She kept blinking her eyes for the tears were hot and rushing: "What will your mother say, Mary? Oh, I can't stand so much—"

Mary's dark face was all dashed with fire: "I'm so glad you came, Chickie—you can't imagine how we've waited and waited for that wire from Jonathan. Don't you like your room? Why are you hanging back? No one there but mother—not even Tommy—"

Martha came down the walk. She drew Chickie in her wealthy arms, the mellow voice deep and vibrant: "Thank God, Chickie dear—we have you back again . . ."

Chickie didn't say a word. And she couldn't drink the tea that Martha made.

She looked at this old friend and smiled through tears. There was such faith in Martha's rich, dark eyes. They always seemed like torches; they were beckoning things.

Now Martha thought it fine that she was back; now Martha said she would do noble things and every one be proud to claim her. . . .

Oh, yes! But Chickie hurried back to that new, gay room they had builded—knowing that her heart was not a brave and fighting thing as Martha said; knowing that if she dared she would just hide here and never walk into the street again.

Back—yes. But for what?

Chickie knew as no other could that she had made but a sorry fight. And knew as those who brought her here could never guess, that she was cornered now.

CHAPTER XXII

THE GAMUT

Chickie went about the new sun room touching the plants. There were boxes with marigolds, and in the corners great wooden pots with young trees of Spanish broom just coming into golden flower.

She was dressed and waiting. The moments pressed about her, like living things weighted with portent. She touched the leaves in a loitering, absent way, yet the flapping of a curtain made her spring back with a start. Now and then she drew long, stabbing breaths.

She was going down town with Mary. She was going out to meet the issue face to face.

That morning Martha Blake said to her: "They're having a sale of Wilton rugs. We need one for the living room. Will you go down with Mary and select it?"

It was the third day since Chickie's return. She had not left the house. Oh—there was so much to see—so much to do—getting things unpacked, running into the kitchen to inspect the new waffle iron or to feel the icy air in a second cooler Jonathan had built— And then it was so quiet here—so shut from all the world—not even mountains to see—only their own secluded garden.

She said to Martha: "Why, I'm no judge of carpet—you go—"

Martha came over to the table where Chickie was arranging books. Martha picked up one of these and turned the pages, regarding Chickie's white, nervous face with her steadfast eyes. They were like Jimmy's.

She said quietly: "The longer you delay, Chickie, the harder it is going to be. Don't you know that? When we owe a debt to life, she comes patiently and duns us for the payment. She has an implicit faith in our wish to make good for the great gift we hold from her. But we can put her off too long. And one day we lose our credit. Without a word of warning, she will snatch up our chance. She will pass us by

as a cheat, a defaulter and give to one more valiant the rôle that should be ours."

Chickie dusted the bindings. "Oh—I guess it's not much of a rôle that I'm to play now—"

"A bigger rôle than you would ever have won before. Now, what if it is a little harder? Can't you look at yourself in that light? As one given the flaming cross to bear, and if he does it well, how fine the crown!"

Ho—flaming cross! It seemed to Chickie that they were thrusting it at her—all of them—Jonathan, Mary, Mary's mother. She might protest; she might hide her hands behind her back. They would make her bring them forth; make her take a hold—

So now she was waiting for Mary to come. When the bell finally rang she called breezily: "I'll bring you home some caramels, Jennie, ole dear," and walked out, giving the door a little nervous resentful bang.

Mary's own face was sharp with excitement. She talked in a jagged, uneasy way, helping Chickie to the car as though Chickie were feeble.

Chickie said hoarsely: "There's Dick Enright down there in the corner. He's looking at us."

Mary said: "Bow to him. For pity sakes!"

Chickie did this and looked out of the window, her eyes hot.

And this heat traveled down to her throat. By the time they reached Sixth Street she felt stifled. She gave Mary a nudge and stood up: "Let's get off—quick!"

Mary followed her.

She said: "I never felt like this before, Mary. It's nearly noon. We'll bump into every one. I feel all cold inside."

"Are you going to turn back now?"

Chickie gave a sharp, hysterical laugh and walked on. Mary took her arm. Suddenly it seemed to her that this trifling shopping excursion was the turning point in her life and that if she faltered now she would never pick up again—she would never go on. She walked more swiftly; Mary took short, running steps to keep pace with her.

Chickie said: "We might as well go down Grant Avenue. Come on— Why don't you come, Mary?"

They were at Geary. Chickie pretended to fix her collar. She was so hot she could scarcely breathe. But she paused at the windows. She pointed out a new winter coat and stood

there talking vivaciously—laughing. Mary said in a troubled whisper: "What's the matter—your eyes are blazing. . . ."

"Nothing—we may as well look at everything. We may meet Janina. I tried to get her on the phone. Every one is out of town. Mary—look—is that Bess Abbot—"

"How should I know—"

Mary became alarmed. Chickie's lips were white, but her cheeks struck with crimson. She said: "Overdo things! That's you, Chickie! You don't have to smash the whole world in the face the first day."

But Chickie didn't stop. They were just behind the tall, slender girl in the smart, black dress. Chickie touched her arm with a breathless: "Bess—how are you?"

It was not Bess Abbot, but a girl who smiled readily when Chickie said: "Oh, I beg your pardon! I followed you a block, thinking you were a friend of mine—"

Mary said sharply with a trace of alarm in her tone: "We came down to buy a rug."

Chickie laughed. She was shaking from head to foot.

They bought the rug—afterwards they went to lunch. Mary said bitingly: "Let's go down to Mitchell and ask for your job back!"

Chickie kept her eyes on her plate. At last she said: "Are you angry, Mary? Why?"

"Well—why do you need to show people defiance? That's what you're doing now. . . ."

"Oh, Lord—Mary! What in the world should I do?"

"Act as if no one existed but you and me and people like us who know. Let every one else go hang."

Chickie said: "I have no poise left it seems. You know, Mary, I'm the biggest coward on the earth. The thought of going back to an office and walking back and forth over Montgomery Street is enough to put me in a faint. I can just know the thoughts of men who look at me and remember; and the excitement of girls when they pass me. I can hear the talk of them in dressing rooms afterwards."

Mary was silent. She stirred sugar viciously in her coffee. "Are you going back to an office, Chickie?"

"What else can I do?"

"You wrote so much about that Eva. Mother and I were thinking—"

"You mean that I might go into a hospital?"

"Yes—"

"You know I'd like it. I really would. But Eva says it's the hardest, meanest work in the world, and she wouldn't let any girl she knows go in for it if she could stop them—"

Mary shrugged. "Lots of people use the same reasoning to show that we have no right to bring children here. It's a rich way to look at things, isn't it?"

Chickie was not afraid of the grind or routine. Eva had said to her once: "Well—of course, a girl has to have references. They investigate in some cases, I know . . ."

Now she told it to Mary.

Mary said: "You can get references. There's mother and I and your friend, Jake Munson. You could get by—"

They talked of it—they became feverish. Chickie didn't sleep that night. She got up early and wrote down the addresses of hospitals. At first she thought of asking Mary to go with her—then she decided to go alone.

A pale, youngish woman, with worried blue eyes and nostrils that quivered, received her in the first hospital. She was the superintendent of nurses. In a very impersonal, business way she outlined qualifications.

Only girls of the highest character and loyalty were wanted. They must be girls with a high school education. They required references. She named them all.

Chickie looked over a blank that the woman handed her. It had numberless questions . . . was the applicant married—was she divorced—

Chickie said: "I suppose you investigate the girl's character?"

"Assuredly. We have to be very strict. A nurse's position calls for a woman who can measure up to the highest responsibilities. A hospital must be very strict about this. Remember, we are entrusting lives to a nurse's care."

She looked sharply at Chickie and suddenly asked: "You're inquiring for yourself, are you, Miss Bryce?"

"Yes—"

She nodded, and said with an air of dismissal: "Well, I gave you all that is required."

Chickie got up, her limbs trembling. She felt as though she had plunged in cold water.

CHAPTER XXIII

BURNING BRIDGES

Would any one say she was a girl of the highest character? And if, by chance, she gained admittance to one of these hospitals, then some one found out about her, would she be expelled?

Chickie thought of this and went with shoving, reluctant steps down the block.

This was along Twenty-second Street for the City and County Hospital was the second on her list. It was near to home. Besides, Eva said big hospitals gave better training and a wider experience.

She walked very slowly through the iron gate. She admired the wide lawn—not so bad to be poor, after all.

A big-boned, kindly nurse with a crisp manner received her. She asked Chickie questions, studying her frankly as she did so. Why was Chickie giving up business? Was she prepared for a life of arduous but stirring responsibility?

And in a brief, glowing way she began to sketch the duties and compensations of the young nurse's life—made it seem a thrilling, heroic calling. Chickie's imagination took fire as it had when Eva talked.

Miss Simonds said, "Well—with your business training, Miss Bryce, and your attitude, you should make a success. I think we'll be glad to have you. You'll find it pleasant here. Don't let any one discourage you. You should enter with the January class. The need for girls of high caliber is always urgent."

Chickie said with an air of lightness, "I'm not sure that I'm quite equal to all your requirements—"

"You'll soon gain confidence." Then she told Chickie to file her application with the State Board of Nurses for it must pass upon her references and qualifications. She said she would be delighted to enroll her.

Chickie was foolish in her thanks. So lovely in Miss Simonds to speak like that! A girl passed in white cap and uni-

form. She had visions of herself walking through the corridor so.

New life—new opportunities—glorious work. Now some one needed yards and yards of skin—who would volunteer? Chickie saw herself nobly offering all the cuticle on her body. Now there was a fire in the children's ward—Chickie was the one to rush in and carry out little ones half buried in smoke. Her mind flashed with these brilliant images of Chickie—peerless nurse.

But she didn't tell Jonathan or Jennie what she had done. The sneaking fear that she might be rejected was with her night and day.

Jake was out of town. She wondered if she might use his name and wired: "I'm home again to stay. I'm going to become a trained nurse if they'll accept me. Could I use your name as reference?"

The next morning was a telegram: "Use the name, Helena, dear, and anything else you may need. Bless you—here's your first patient and no mistake!"

It put a courage in her and a patience yet she and Mary were beside themselves with anxiety. Chickie said: "I was a fool to expose myself to this. They're looking it up. They're taking a frightful long time. I'll never be accepted."

Mary said: "Oh! I don't believe they run a detective bureau. They haven't phoned to mother about you." They went through worried conversations like this after every mail.

When finally the letter came and Chickie's application was accepted, she was so spent with her week of uncertainty that she broke down and cried. She passed from moods of reckless gladness to others of the most intense foreboding.

Jonathan was filled with pride over this venture of hers. Every night he stood behind her chair and dropped a napkin like a cap on her head: "What do you think of your girl now, mother?" he said. "More like an angel than a nurse, isn't she?"

But Jennie couldn't see the necessity of this. Going to live in a hospital? Leave this pretty room? They'd be alone again. But finally she came to Chickie and said quietly: "You're a very brave girl—Chickie dear. You are braver than your mother."

There was no shame then in Jennie's faded eyes.

It was nearing Christmas time. In all the windows along

Fair Oaks were holly wreaths. And in their cottage there were three, each tied with a smart crimson bow.

Last year they had hung up wreaths, too—waiting for her. Now whenever Chickie came into the room where Jennie was there would be a little hurried rolling up of her apron and the sewing hidden; bits of ribbon and bits of lace sticking out here and there. As though Chickie didn't know the delightful things Jennie was making.

The two of them had packages hidden everywhere, and it was "Don't open that! Don't look there! Come, now, you'll have to wait!" And red berries in old jardinières, in every corner, so that all about the place was this glad, piney breath of the holidays.

Chickie wondered if these two were really happy now; or, if, underneath, their hearts were bowed. Did they keep thinking of the last year and all those letters and the loneliness? Did they mourn for the blithe, golden thing who was gone, and for all those dreams of her that could never be?

And was the loss hard to bear? Was the shame hard? How did Jennie feel when she went out in the morning for her shopping? Did her blood flash when neighbors spoke, especially if they said, "And how is Chickie now?"

Late one afternoon Chickie met Mrs. Bigelow. She was waddling along, her plump, short arms filled with packages. Roy Bigelow, her only son, had been in love with Chickie during their high school days. He was a long-necked, ungainly youth. Chickie used to tease him and laugh in his face just to see it grow red and shiny.

Now Mrs. Bigelow said to her: "Well, Chickie Bryce, so you're home for good, are you? I was just wondering about it."

She regarded Chickie—her chin drawn up and wrinkled like an immense walnut. Her eyes settled on the white gardenia Chickie had pinned to her blue suit. "You're not looking downcast, I see. But as I was saying to Roy last night, you done well to come home. You might just as well take your punishment—not that I'd ever be one to throw stones. But curdled milk is curdled milk, and no use trying to make out that it's whole.

"You do well to admit it, Chickie. And as Roy said to me, who knows but what some man may be willing to overlook it—seems they ain't so particular nowadays—"

She dropped two of her numerous bundles. Chickie stooped and picked them up. Setting them on top of the others, she looked directly into Mrs. Bigelow's wide, steamy face: "Did Roy say that, Mrs. Bigelow? That's real big in him. But will you tell Roy for me, please, that no man shall ever have a chance to overlook me and my faults."

Chickie ran up the steps, shaking. That night she said to Jennie: "Mother, do the neighbors talk much to you? Do they make you very unhappy?"

Jennie's fair skin turned faintly pink, but there came a light into her eyes. She answered with pathetic formality: "Your mother is proud of you, Chickie, dear."

"So they do—do they? Some day they'll have cause to talk! You bet they shall!"

She dreamed of this childish revenge. Oh—she would do some magnificent and splendid thing—ram her nobility down their throats; tower above them like a new, flaming Joan. This was her goal. The hospital was to offer it.

CHAPTER XXIV

NEW BEGINNING

SATURDAY afternoon, the beginning of January. Janina came out to see her. Nearly a year and a half since they'd met.

Janina caught Chickie's hands and stared at her, the black, brilliant eyes moist. She said, "Well, old thing!" and turned her head sharply.

Janina stayed hours. She knelt on the floor and folded Chickie's clothes. Once she said abruptly, "I envy you more than ever."

"Why?"

Janina didn't answer this. She said instead, "You're burning every bridge! You didn't need to. You give me a queer feeling, Chickie, like a nun renouncing the world, the flesh and the devil!"

Chickie laughed, the old sense of comradeship stealing blithely upon her. "No, Janina—they've renounced me!"

Janina shrugged. After a long while she said, "I suffered enough on your account, ole dear! Do you believe that? I had the conceit to suppose that it might have been things I said that were to blame—"

"No—myself—only—"

"That's one reason why I envy you." She stacked the dainty underwear between long pads of sachet. "Your mother is a sweet soul, isn't she? She made all these? Chickie—" The tone was so sharp Chickie turned pale. Janina's voice lowered. "You know they're in the city now?"

"No—I didn't."

"They are. I just thought you might as well know. You're not likely to meet them—you never can tell, though."

Chickie tried to say: "I wouldn't care! I never think of them, never!"

But her tongue was dry as dust in her mouth.

Janina went on: "Well—I happened to be at Bess Abbot's when they dropped in to return some books—"

Suddenly Chickie said: "Oh—never mind, Janina. No, I don't want to hear it."

"You might as well. You can't help but think it."

Chickie went over to the closet and stared at the clothes still hanging there. Suddenly she said: "Does every one think they know who it was? How can they?"

"They know you, Chickie. You—it was pretty well rumored about."

A thing that had been sticking like a blade far down in Chickie's heart she now pulled out. She faced Janina quietly but her lips were drawn. "You know I even hoped, Janina, that they wouldn't. Oh—I mean her—I just didn't want her to know—"

Janina said: "I imagine she knows. She's no fool. But, of course, no one can kid herself along as a wife can who is still wildly infatuated with her husband. He looks like the very devil. I gave him a few looks that I hope to heaven let him see what I couldn't say—"

Chickie walked over and sat on the edge of the trunk. She said: "That bridge is burned, Janina, more completely than any of the others. Oh, yes, it is. You don't know—"

There were times when memories of Barry Dunne came even in dreams to Chickie's mind. There were moments when her thought was suspended and all along her nerves went a glow. They were moments of flashing brevity. They ended always in the one scene. It was the night when she had met him in the restaurant; when he had put her off; when he had not told her that he was married. But, instead, he had rushed her to the taxi and, when she had raised her face appealingly, letting him see how terribly and with what utter completeness her heart was his—when she had made that pitiful revelation, he had stooped and brushed his lips on hers.

To appease her! To quiet her! Her love had gone to death then—oh, completely.

She smiled now at Janina. She said: "It seems like part of another life—even of some one else's life. Now—especially—I want to throw myself into this."

Monday when Chickie entered the hospital, when Jonathan drove her over so proudly, she found waiting for her in the Nurses' Home an enormous basket of chrysanthemums. She knew, of course, they were from Jake.

The note said: "Dear Angel of Mercy, here's to you. May

the way be as bright for yourself as you'll make it for the lucky devils who fall by your wayside. I'll be one of them—never doubt it! Jake."

Martha Blake said to her when she came to bid her good-by: "So you're going to lose yourself for a while, Chickie? And you're going to bring us back a nobler, bigger self?"

Chickie answered with a laugh: "Ho—you preach at me—"

Yet leaving Jonathan at the steps of the hospital; going back to her room in the Nurses' Home Chickie felt within her this stirring uplift of renunciation. Oh—glorious to cut loose like this; plunge with all her heart into a new life—different from anything she had ever known—utterly different.

She stood now in her blue and white uniform filled with a sense of exaltation; of beginning again, yet this time thrillingly. She looked about the room, nervous yet eager.

There were two white iron beds, two wardrobes and two great chests of drawers. Chickie's roommate had arrived the previous week. A gray sweater was flung on the bed and on the dresser was a box of powder half open. Chickie wondered what this girl might be like; if they would become friends.

In other rooms she heard voices. From her window she could see Twin Peaks, the Statue of Liberty and even the spires of the far distant St. Ignatius Church. She felt alone yet with a deep astonishment of peace.

And as she stood there, Myrtle Downs entered—a girl about twenty-six with large eyes and a narrow, intent face. Her apron was crumpled; her cheeks pale with a kind of sullen excitement.

She gave Chickie a swift, curious glance: "You're Bryce, I suppose!"

Chickie laughed: "I suppose I am—"

Myrtle gave a toss with her head, went over to her dresser and very angrily powdered her cheeks. As she did this she talked explosively. "Made a bed yet?"

Chickie stared. "Made a bed? Hundreds of them."

"Humph. So you just arrived?" Myrtle's eyes blinked. "I'd like to know what difference it makes to a patient whether the corners of a sheet are squared or plain!"

Suddenly Myrtle shrugged. "Oh, well—all in a life."

Then Chickie said: "You and I are roommates, aren't we?"

"Sure thing! Do you think I just blew in here by accident?" Now she turned around and surveyed Chickie with a leisurely completeness, saying: "Why have you come into training?"

"I thought I'd like it—you meet so many people and you can do a lot of good for them. Why did you?"

"Excitement, and other reasons. But I know I'm not going to like it. I wasn't born for this. There's a class—did you know that? We'll just be in time."

Myrtle pulled open drawers, rifled their contents, left the drawers open. "Got an extra handkerchief? Mine are all in the laundry." She came over to Chickie's dresser. "Thanks—say, you're neat, aren't you? Always keep things like that?"

"Yes—"

"Come on, then—I'll let you arrange mine—some day."

Chickie was a little disconcerted, even a bit miffed with this sharp familiar treatment, but her nerves were now too finely strung to be daunted.

And when she sat in the lecture room with twenty other beginners, the majority of them eager and flushed as herself, she listened to the nurse in a dream. Oh—they were starting on a career of magnificent service. The demands were great; the discipline severe. They must be willing to forget themselves for the good of others and the harmony of the group. Yes—the instructress ended with a quotation—the words of it rang like an inspiration into Chickie's thought:

"You have found your purpose. Fling your life out into it; and the loftier your purpose is the more sure you will be to make the world richer with every enrichment of yourself."

Chickie thought that beautiful. The whole of that first day she was keyed to an abnormal excitement. She was allowed to go into one of the wards. And as she looked at the long row of white beds, at the forms of women, some of them flat on their backs, others sitting half upright, each one seemed to her mysterious, tremendously important. One asked for a drink of water—she could have run to get it and when it came to the passing of the trays she would have liked to sit at each bed a moment and chat.

There was a young girl who had heart failure. When Chickie set down her tray she whispered: "Wipe off my face, nurse, will you?" Chickie felt as though an honor were hers.

"Evening Care" they called this when she went from bed to bed, straightening out sheets, washing hands and faces, cleaning cups, bringing fresh ice water.

One woman looked to her like Jennie—a gentle face with such young girl eyes though she must have been at least fifty. Chickie combed her hair. The woman said: "You're very gentle—" Chickie's eyes shone.

That seemed a benediction to her. She went back to her room, elated. Every day would be warm with these rich contacts.

She thought of the woman with the sweet eyes—wondered if there had been great joys in her life and now that she was dying were there many left to grieve. Or was she all alone? Had she always done without and without?

Chickie looked from the window, picking out the patch of sky that should be just above the cottage on Fair Oaks. They were wondering how she got along—they were talking of her —she promised Jonathan she would phone.

As she was about to go downstairs, Myrtle came in: "How did you get by? Did they run you ragged? I had one patient my first day and I had to bring her water every two minutes and another one who made me wash her cup nineteen times, I declare."

"I had it easy, then—"

Myrtle was standing again before her mirror. Her eyes were very bright. She gave Chickie a smile: "Been down in the reception hall within the last minute? Weeeee! It's wonderful!"

The phone bell rang. Myrtle answered, looked at Chickie with a vast interest: "It's for you! I'll be darned—"

When Chickie didn't understand, she repeated: "What's in the hall is waiting for you. You better gallop down or he'll be grabbed!"

Chickie was alarmed: "Is it permitted to have a man come here?"

"Of course! You're off duty. Bring him into the writing room. If you're worried I'll take him off your hands."

Chickie went downstairs slowly. In the beautiful, square hall—spacious yet simple and homey, girls, some of them in uniform, some in street clothes, were walking back and forth. Standing at the door was Jake.

CHAPTER XXV

JAKE'S OFFER

He came over with a rollicky light in his eyes. He took Chickie's hands and surveyed her from head to foot. He said, hunching his head in his cosy way: "Helena! Blue and white!" And he seemed immensely tickled as though this were a picnic or a capricious whim of hers.

"Now git your hat, will ye, and we'll off for a canter and see what all this may be about."

Chickie was aware of intent eyes from the rooms adjoining and from the stairs where girls were passing. Jake, too, was aware of this—the handsome face had a gay, challenging look.

Chickie said: "I shouldn't go out the first night. I'm to study, you know."

"Begin to-morrow. I'll take you for a run out to your darling Jonathan. How's that?"

She ran back to her room. Myrtle was sitting there waiting. She said: "He doesn't happen to be your brother, does he, Bryce?"

"No."

"Going out?"

"Just around the block—"

"Give him my love, will you?"

Chickie only put on her coat, not stopping to change her uniform. This was the first thing Jake noted when they were sitting in the car. He said: "Are you that proud of it, Helena, my dear?"

"Oh, I am, Jake. I feel happy to-day—it's glorious."

"How long do you intend to stay at it?"

"Three years. That's the course."

"Do you mean to tell me that you're going to make a prisoner of yourself for the next three years? Do you think this is what you want from life, my dear?"

"Oh, Jake—what we want from life! I tried that, didn't I?

"Yes, I tried that, Jake. You see what happened. So now —well—oh, this seems quite glorious to me—"

Jake's eyes were warm and glowing, but the red mouth was white.

"So you mean to bury yourself, Helena?"

"Ho—they tell me I'm to find myself."

"What are you to find? Do you even know what you want?"

They had driven past Twin Peaks and through the curving roads of the outlying residence parks till they came to a lonely bluff above Ninth Avenue that seemed the very edge of the world. Below them were the dreaming eucalyptus trees with the lights of a hundred homes, swinging like yellow lanterns through their branches. To the north, far sweeping under a ripe gold moon, the ocean stretched.

It was a blue, still night. Down the bluff and just at their feet, an abandoned quarry gave a touch poetic yet desolate to the scene.

Chickie sat a little forward, her hands clasped in her lap. Jake made a place for her with his arm. She mused at the ease of this; the quiet way their old relationship revived.

"How far away from everything we seem—"

Jake watched her intently. He repeated: "Do you even know what you want, Chickie?"

For moments she pondered, her profile turned towards him. And touched as it was with the white, wistful eagerness, with this new, pathetic fervor, awakened in Jake a piercing tenderness, an immense and challenging desire. She talked softly and her eyes shone. "Are you trying to make me think of things that are finished, Jake?"

"What can be finished at twenty-two?"

"Almost twenty-three. I'll tell you what is finished. It's this: The time when I can say what I want or even think about it. For now I have to take what I can get, and it doesn't at all matter whether this turns out to be what I might like—just that I can be of use—"

"So you mean to put Helena Bryce into a nunnery and cut her off without a penny's pleasure? For why, my dear?"

She gave a low, uncertain laugh, glancing at him shyly. "I thought you'd be quite thrilled about it, Jake. Why, I thought you'd say I was a very noble being!"

He looked down with a kind, ironic smile. "How did you

misjudge me like that, Helena dear, and Life and I such chums? You mean to climb on a martyr's pyre and you think I'll bring the torch to light it? I love Life far too much to see the beauty of denial."

"Then you don't believe in service? Not at all?"

"I do, indeed. You can serve best by taking your due of all the fine and happy things. I've told you that. It's little short of suicide for you to kill the youth that should be yours."

She was vaguely disappointed, imagining all the world should share this new, high fervor of hers. Instinctively she stiffened. Jake perceived it and hunched his shoulder, looking in her face: "Indeed, Miss Bryce! So we're bound to be a martyr, are we? All right! Then we'll hop to it. But listen to me, Helena. You're not to imagine things are finished for you. That's a fatal error. Because they're not!"

She drew a long, sighing breath and closed her eyes.

His mood sobered. "Do you think you must kill your heart to let your spirit live, Chickie? Must you be as grim as this about it?"

"It's not that I'm grim, Jake, but I haven't the dreams I used to have. They're all gone. So I've got to have some purpose to take their place. I don't want to keep thinking of myself. I mean to let the future sneak on unconsidered. If I'm just plunged in work things won't seem so barren. . . ."

She opened her heart thus to Jake, not knowing that she let him see its hunger, its young worship of love. And that love to her was even yet and would always be the beauty of life and its fulfillment. A future robbed of this was a future meaningless and barren.

To Jake, then she was infinitely more desirable than she had ever been. For she was further from his path—and he felt it. He had known the stainless purity of her girlhood would one day reveal its heart of flame. And he had waited for the flame to kindle.

But now, awakened and self-aware, she brought her fires to an altar. They must burn themselves to ashes there. It was an alien shrine where Jake had never kneeled.

He still kept her hands in his. "So you mean to sweep away the soft and pleasant things? Are you trying to give me a gentle out, too, Helena, dear?"

"Oh, no! I'd be quite heartbroken if you should disappear. And yet—"

"What?"

She was thinking of the rich, colorful life; the thronging pleasures that were Jake's, and no longer hers. She said: "This way isn't your way, Mr. Jake, I guess."

"True enough, my dear." He slumped down comfortably, regarding her with a musing, indulgent smile. "True enough! But who can tell? Now I may take a notion to put an extra rose in that crown of yours!" He gave her a cosy nudge with his elbow. "I've had a premonition of it right along. God wot, an' ye may reform me yet!"

"I'd hate to spoil you, Jake, I really would."

"Now—we'll see. So that's that. Will you come to the opera on your night off, Miss Bryce?"

"Oh—so soon? I don't want to—no—"

"Why, Chickie? You're back in the city. People know of it—"

She breathed hotly. "Do they? But I'd hate to dress all up and go walking down that aisle."

"We could go into the gallery the first time, if you like—"

She gave him a queer, appealing look. "Would you want to be seen among all that crowd with me? It was different in Los Angeles. You didn't think, did you, Jake?"

She could see a straightening of the red, full lips. "Do you want to come, Helena? I have a box for every night. I'd like to take you."

In her mind's eye were faces peering at her. Most vivid among these, strangely enough, was the face of Ila Moore. She said, faltering: "Not yet. I suppose I shouldn't care if people think me calloused or if they talk about me. I do, though. Oh, I'd hate to go." She became nervous and rubbed her hands together. "You better not be bothering with me, Mr. Jake. You just better go your own way. After a while, when I work hard at this, it will be much easier."

"Why will it?"

She laughed. "Oh, you see, I'm to do so much good; I'm to forget myself so completely that pretty soon I'll know I don't count. So I'll be able to laugh at hurts and such. I'll wonder why any one should bother to snub me. I won't be touched by it. I'll be so quite wrapped up in this magnificence. Well!"

It seemed to Chickie that an odd sadness filed into Jake's

eyes and rested there. He said, quietly: "Is it to accomplish all that, Helena?"

"That's the way it seems to me. I guess you think I can't make the grade, Jake?"

"I'm only wondering if it's worth the effort it will cost. I see no value in these harder ways. I don't know why you should be selected to walk them."

"I want to. I really do!"

"Nothing for an old dog then but to go wagging along and bark at your heels, eh? And if your way gets too rough—"

She laughed: "You'll be on hand to point out brighter ones, will you?"

He drew his arm quietly about her shoulders. "That I will, Helena, dear—"

"But the brighter ones are not as sure, Jake."

"Indeed they are, and you have a right to tread them. Don't lose sight of that, Chickie. Don't get lost in foolish regrets. You mustn't. How dared you ask if I should want to be seen among all that crowd with you? I'm telling you that any man—any of them—should be glad enough to walk at your side. Remember it!"

"Oh, well—" She kept her head down and trembled for he was close to her and she could feel his breath warm on her neck. She was afraid of things that he might say.

"Helena, turn your face that I can see it!"

"No—Jake—"

"Please. You don't know—Helena; it's been a long time—"

"Jake—don't—"

His breath drew short. His arm like steel on hers. "All right—all right—but listen, if your way—"

"But it won't. It won't—oh—you don't want me to fail now, do you, just that you can save me?"

He held her hands. Then he laughed: "I'm not sure but what I want that very thing, Helena, dear!"

She looked up and smiled, throwing back her head: "You don't, Jake! And I'm not going to—I'm just not!"

She was utterly sure of herself then. Come back alone! No one should help—she would never need Jake's brighter way.

CHAPTER XXVI

MEASURING UP

Myrtle was sitting on the edge of Chickie's bed filing her nails. Chickie's manicure case with all her treasured tools, her fine scissors, orange wood sticks, cuticle oil, was open on the dresser. The room had an air of disorder and mussiness very irritating to Chickie's lofty mood.

Myrtle said: "Let him go early, didn't you? Have a good time?"

"Yes. How did these get here?" Chickie's coat and her blue silk sweater were flung carelessly on a chair.

"Oh, some of the girls were in! Getting cold, isn't it? Too bad you didn't come a little earlier. Gates had a box of pastry. Say, this is a bird of a file . . . dandy polish. What's the name of it?"

Chickie had never known a sister, nor had she ever shared a room with any one. She had never come home to find the air charged with her expensive perfume, and her best shoes walking out on some one else's feet.

Now, seeing Myrtle gouging at her nails with vigor enough to snap the scissors, she was all bristling with resentment. She hung up her clothes, and going over to the dresser, brushed off powder and little crimson flecks of rouge.

Myrtle laughed good-naturedly: "Fussy as an old maid, aren't you? You'll get over it, I'll bet a hat. It's all give and take here."

Chickie thought with a childish anger: "Oh, yes; I'll give and you take!" But she said: "We have to get up at six, don't we? I think I'll go to bed—"

"Good idea! Say—do you smoke?"

"Yes—sometimes."

"Where do you keep them? I've looked everywhere."

"I didn't bring any. I heard it was against the rules."

"Hell—suppose it is? Go and knock on Gates' door, will you? I'm famished for a puff."

"What's the matter with your own feet?"

"I'm sitting on them, can't you see? Don't, then!"

Chickie laughed. Myrtle slipped off her shoes, went tiptoeing into the hall. She came back with a match and one cigarette. She went over and noisily raised the window. "I don't suppose they come snooping around at this hour, do you? Well, tell us about your friend. Lord, you're about as talkative as a wooden Indian! Did you go to a show?"

"No—just for a ride—"

"Ah—haa!" Myrtle hummed softly in a very sweet tone: "Little love, a little kiss—" Then she asked: "What kind of a machine? Are you pretty crazy about him?"

Chickie was not given to ready confidences, and she hated questions, even from Mary and Janina. The gall of this Myrtle overwhelmed her. Especially now, when she longed for a swift communion with herself; when she wanted to get her thoughts in tune for the days and the work before her.

She said, flippantly: "Call again with a search warrant, woman, and I'll open every door! Good night! I think I'll take a shower."

The shower rooms were down the hall. Two girls, wrapped in kimonos, their faces shining, came out. They were laughing softly—and gave Chickie a friendly nod. They also were beginners. One said in a whisper: "Are you scared stiff? I am. Everything I did was wrong. . . . Hush, you're scraping your feet! Better not turn the water on too hard."

Chickie wished that one of these had chanced to be her roommate. For they were both young, frightened, eager.

She saw in their eyes the meek yet feverish enthusiasm she felt in her own thoughts. She stood a long while, letting the hot water, then the cold dash against her face; she held up her arms, delighting in the thin silver streams pouring over her shoulders. Odd that she was here—almost like a new life—like a birth into a different world. It would be this—all of this for her—she would make it so.

When she came back to the room, Myrtle was in bed, reading. She began immediately to talk: "Say—why can't they use plain English in this—gastroentero—Lord, I give it up—that's only half of it—"

Chickie was in the habit of speaking with herself when she lay in bed. Just now as she was full of conversation such as:

"Ho—to-morrow—exciting—I'll work. I want to get up early—but why was Jake so ironic about it? He doesn't really trust me. He thinks I'm weak—well—but I'm not going to be—"

Myrtle kept interrupting her, even though she pretended to sleep. Finally Myrtle said: "You're devilish sociable, aren't you? Lord, I just about begin to wake up at midnight." In a few moments she was snoring with a catchy breath that sounded as though she would strangle.

Chickie got out of bed and looked from the window. There was one great star just above the spired hills and all the sky was of midnight blue. She looked at this until her eyes grew warm with tears. Yes—how blessed that there are to-morrows! And that, at last, the yesterday is done!

It seemed to her in those first days in the ward that the work was a consecration, and she, even more than others, fitted for it.

Mrs. Quinn was the little woman who looked like Jennie—the one who said when Chickie combed her hair: "You're so gentle—" It was Chickie's fourth day that this patient called for water again and again. When Chickie smiled at her, she shook her head. She was taking short, heaving breaths and her eyes wavered so that Chickie was frightened.

Once she said in a vague, lost way: "No one comes for me—no one cares—for me—no one—my legs are heavy, dear—awfully heavy—move the blankets—"

There were blue, tortuous veins in these poor, aching limbs. Chickie had almost fainted once, seeing them. She had been afraid that the veins would burst. Now Mrs. Quinn begged: "Bathe them—you stay here—never mind them—no one cares—"

Chickie said: "Yes—of course they do—"

The woman smiled. It made Chickie's throat clutch the way she smiled: "No—dear—no one—"

A little later she called for water again. Then she reached with a helpless, distracted gesture under the pillow and took out a pin—a little brassy scarf pin with a red stone. She moved it to Chickie: "Keepsake—you're good to me—there—"

Even as she held the glass of water her hand trembled violently. Her eyes that had been wandering about the room fixed in a stare of mortal anguish. They riveted on Chickie in a pitiful bewilderment. Then a gray blueness like a living

shadow went across her mouth. That was all—her jaws parted—her head dropped back.

Chickie went white with terror. She started in a little run down the ward. She said to the supervisor: "Come quick—hurry—she's dying!"

The supervisor got up quietly and walked to Mrs. Quinn's bed. She looked at the bluish face, got a screen and walled it about the bed. In the same measured way she phoned for the interne.

Chickie was shaken to the heart and wished to rush back to the bed; speak to the dead woman; even touch her face—oh, make sure of it. . . .

A strained, miserable silence like a cowering thing crept into the long room. From other beds eyes were fixed on the curtained screen.

The doctor came. He was there but a few moments. Then the nurse phoned again.

And this time a man entered the ward pushing a guerney. He had a white sheet under his arm. He, too, went behind the screen. Chickie brought a glass of water to another patient in the bed adjoining. She saw the man shove the body to the stretcher, cover it with the sheet. The other patient twitched her sleeve. "Gone—is she? I knew it this morning—"

Chickie couldn't speak. It seemed to her that they should have knelt down; that some one should have pressed the poor old woman's hand—

She passed the supervisor at her desk. She wanted to say: "Where are they taking her? Isn't it awful? Why, she was just talking—poor old thing—she gave me this—" The supervisor seemed to have forgotten.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE DANCE

THERE might be humiliations and petty shames in this new life. Chickie was censured bitterly for her stupidity in the first bedmaking lesson, where each blanket had a ritual of its own. Yet she loved the work—loved its quick, vivid throb: its touch at the warm breast of things. She wanted passionately to shine here.

She soon learned to take reprimand gracefully, just as she learned to stand aside when the senior nurses passed; or to shrug when Myrtle wore her clothes or hung her weekly wash all about the chairs and dressers.

For there were plenty of compensations. Each time that Chickie walked arm in arm with Phyllis Stone or Margaret Howard—though it was merely across the street to buy a soda, she had a feeling of almost guilty joy.

These girls liked her—they knew nothing of her. Sometimes she felt as light hearted, as free as in the days when she sauntered down Grant Avenue with Janina or Mary. Why—living in this house with some eighty other girls, most of them young like herself, was as though she were grabbed back into the sweetness, the carefree, monotonous happiness of her earliest girlhood.

And she could enter far more readily into the thoughts and the ideals of these two than she could those of Myrtle and Sophie Gates.

Phyllis said: "Aren't the doctors wonderful? They work miracles."

Chickie agreed.

Myrtle's comment filled her with a hot anger. Myrtle said: "These brows give me a pain, the way they pass you by without ever seeing you as though you were an invisible microbe! I'll bet they're not above playing on the outside!"

Chickie had all of the young nurse's awe of the visiting doctors. In the very beginning she was amazed at the attention given to the patients. She watched the supervisor

going on the ward rounds. It seemed to her that a brightness like a visible magnetism lighted up the space about the beds when the doctors stood there.

There was one in particular who held her admiration. It was a Dr. Ramm. He was tall, with a pale face, very strongly cut, and quiet, but searching eyes. They dwelt kindly on each patient. He seemed to give himself with an utter completeness to his work. And this detached air gave to his expression a note of spirituality that Chickie perceived but didn't analyze. Once she thought: "If I were a man—I would be like that—"

And another time she was coming out of the treatment room as the doctor passed. He said, "Pardon me," very courteously as though she were a graduate. It filled her with excitement.

One day there was a blood transfusion. Dr. Ramm was the surgeon. The probationers on the ward were allowed to attend.

Chickie and Phyllis were present. They saw the wide glass tube and the sharp point of it inserted into the donor's vein. The glass turned crimson, then with a quiet and swiftness entirely magical the filled vessel moved to the recipient, and the blood was transferred to the patient's veins.

Chickie had often dreamed of pouring out her life for some one she loved. It seemed so heroic to offer one's blood. Now she watched, breathless and moved, as though this man working so deftly were one inspired. The whole day she thought of it with a trembling awe.

It was about this time that considerable excitement hummed about the nurses' home. The seniors were preparing for a Valentine party. With the exception of two or three who would be asked to pass sandwiches and act generally as maids, the probationers would not be invited.

There was feverish speculation as to the lucky three chosen.

"I heard they ask the three who have the highest marks for the month," Myrtle said at dinner one evening.

Usually Chickie, Phyllis, Margaret Howard, and Norma Talbot sat at one table. Though Myrtle much preferred the company of Sophie Gates she was distinctly jealous of Chickie's preference. Whenever a vacant chair was at their table, she took it.

She went on: "So that lets us out, Bryce."

Chickie was tired of this classification. She said: "My marks are high. I got 99 in the last test."

Myrtle laughed. "What did you get in bed-making? Zero plus!"

Norma added, bitingly: "Well, I heard they pick the pretty ones—so there! You don't suppose they're going to let old lady Preston in on the hop if she has perfection in everything, do you?"

Old lady Preston was the oldest probationer. She was the mother of three children, a widow, and at least forty.

Whether it was prettiness or brilliance that won, Chickie was chosen. So was Phyllis.

This Phyllis was a slender, very earnest girl about nineteen. She was dark, with bobbed hair and moist brown eyes. Her people had suffered heavy losses. Phyllis came into training with very few clothes and no money.

She had no dress to wear to the dance.

At first Chickie wondered whether she should go. The internes would come and many of the visiting doctors. She became very nervous and went to the senior to excuse herself. The senior said: "You are elected to come. That's all there's to it. You know how jealous the girls may be. Now don't stir up anything."

And she asked Jake.

He said, teasing, "Am I invited?"

"No—"

"Of course, I am! Think what a feather in your cap."

"I haven't my cap yet, and I may not get it—"

"Cap or no cap, Helena dear, I come!"

In her heart she was delighted it turned out like this. She really wanted to go—wanted to keep on pretending that the past year had never been—Ho—she was as free as Phyllis—as any one!

So Phyllis took a great hem in one of Chickie's dresses. Chickie was as rapt and eager as she had been seven years before when Jennie sewed a gown of blue with little silver flowers wrought in the fabric. She was young and thrilled like that.

They decorated the dance hall with crimson hearts and cupids.

Chickie and Phyllis made a great many of the sandwiches. They were honored to be noticed by the seniors; honored when

the seniors came into the little kitchenette and helped themselves greedily before the feast.

Chickie wore the dress of black. It made her face so white—like a pearly flower. She drew her hair in a soft coil.

Nellie Andrews, a senior, said: "For God's sake—why did we ask you!" Then she whispered in Chickie's ear: "Is your handsome friend coming?"

"Yes—"

"Introduce Nellie or I'll make it hot for you if you ever get in my ward."

Chickie was half frightened to attract so much attention. All the nurses looked at Jake. She knew what their comments would be. And he was quite gloating about it. He whispered: "What did I tell you, Helena! This is jubilant!"

She was just introducing Jake to Phyllis when she noticed across the room Miss Alberta, the supervisor who had reprimanded Chickie for stupidity in the bed-making. Miss Alberta wore a stiff, brown taffeta dress and slippers with large colonial wings. They were quite out of style.

Miss Alberta's flat, big face was very flushed and excited. She was talking to Dr. Ramm. His head was raised and he seemed to be entirely remote from the plain, bulky woman at his side.

The internes whom Chickie recognized, but had never met, were taking the seniors for the first dance. The music began.

Jake hummed, swept his arm about her—then he gave a low, throaty laugh and reached out his hand with a familiar: "Hello, Dave! How are you?"

"Jake! Didn't expect to see you here!"

They stopped, moved to the corner. Chickie's heart was at least twice its normal size. It was Dr. Ramm that Jake accosted in this familiar tone. And now he said as though he were talking to any old friend: "Dave—you've probably met Miss Bryce, haven't you?"

"No—"

"Then don't lose any time about it. She'll be a better nurse yet than you're a doctor!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

DR. DAVID

David Ramm was nearly as tall as Jake. He looked down at Chickie with a humorous flicker in his eyes. These eyes gave Chickie a peculiar start as though she had looked into them many times already. They were winning and gray, flecked with amber. He said: "I hope you succeed, Miss Bryce."

She laughed blithely: "You must please excuse Jake for the comparison, Dr. Ramm. He doesn't know any better than to make pert remarks. He's not been on probation, you see!"

Miss Alberta, now painfully red, answered some question of Jake's: "Yes—Mr. Munson, we try to make it pleasant for our girls—of course, some of them are a little slow—" She looked very stodgy with Jake looming above her, smiling and almost ironically attentive. . . .

Then he took Chickie's arm saying: "Like to see you before we leave, Dave—" They weren't out of earshot when he asked in his bold, exuberant way: "Who's the apple dumpling, Helena, done up in the rum brown sauce? She's soft on Dave—"

"Oh, no! She couldn't be. She's years older. Why, that's the lady what calls me names and she's forty—surely—"

"Forty—that's when they like 'em young and tender. God watch between poor Dave and harm! He's a fine fellow, Chickie. I didn't know he was out here. He'll be able to give you a boost. . . ."

Chickie laughed: "You're all wrong, Mr. Munson. Don't you know that your friend Helena is less than the dust? And a great personage like Dr. Ramm won't see me a-tall."

"I noticed eyes in his head just a moment ago. I guess you haven't walked through these halls unseen, Helena Bryce!"

"You may not believe it, Jake, but the doctors think only of their work. They're altogether different."

Jake hunched his shoulders with a deep indulgent laugh: "So that's what they teach you here, is it? Men may be men,

but doctors ain't—eh? You listen to me, Helena dear—a pint is a pound the world round!"

It was more pleasing to Chickie's young enthusiasm to believe that a doctor like young David Ramm was a selfless being, utterly devoted to his work. She said this to Jake, adding: "You don't know. You ought to come here some day and see him operate. You'd be thrilled. And you'd see for yourself—"

"What would I see? That Adam isn't Adam any more? Evolution has gone pellmell since you've taken to nursing, Helena! Keep them on their pedestals, if you will. That's all right with me. But, by heck, how do these fellows manage it—the arrogance of them!"

Then Jake smiled. "I believe his worship is coming over here to ask you to dance, Helena. Shall you be able to get up from your knees?"

She laughed in Jake's face. "I'm only there, mentally—"

But she was excited when Dr. Ramm reached her side—not the poised, flippant Chickie that at nineteen had so whetted Jake with her indifference.

It surprised her to find that he danced—that he was even easy and graceful about it. More than this, he had a very simple, boyish manner. He said: "I haven't met you in the hospital, have I?"

She colored, then with an impish laugh: "Yes. You did me an honor one day. You bumped into me—"

The humorous flicker lighted his eyes: "Ah, no—you mean you bumped into me—"

"Yes—that's the way it was. But you were the one to beg pardon."

"I am that way—"

She felt him looking down at her and blushed. "I saw you do that blood transfusion the other day."

He asked, humbly: "How was it? All right—"

Raising her head swiftly, she found his eyes laughing at her, and this put her at her ease. She lifted a shoulder flippantly. "It seemed magical, and I guess you knew it."

Then he began asking her questions. Was it the first she had seen? How long was she in training? Did she like it? Finally he said: "Have you known Jake long?"

"Yes—about five years."

"Strange we haven't met. I was in Vienna about four years,

but I've been back nearly two. I was in Sausalito a number of times last year. You weren't there."

"I've been away—quite a while—more than a year. I've just returned, you see—"

He was now looking at her closely. His face was lean, yet she thought it handsome and very winning. He said: "You gave up business for this? Why?"

Her cheeks stained brightly and she gave an uneasy, nervous laugh. "Oh, you see, I'm a very conceited person, Dr. Ramm. I wanted to feel of great and noble use in the world. And you don't get that nice, uplifting satisfaction hammering a typewriter. . . ."

Inwardly she wondered: "Did he hear of me, I wonder? Why is he looking at me so sharply? Of course he didn't!" And she talked very quickly and in a light, amusing strain. She saw several seniors watching her—then she caught Miss Alberta's eyes, and said hastily: "Is it according to Hoyle for me to be dancing with you?"

"Why not?"

"Miss Alberta is watching me. I'm really only here to pass the sandwiches. Perhaps I shouldn't have danced—"

"The dancing is done. Don't you like Miss Alberta? Has she made things hard for you?"

"I don't know whether I made them hard for her or she made them mean for me or perhaps it was the bed's fault—"

He laughed: "You won't have much to do with her when you're further along—"

"If I get along—"

"I believe you will—"

Chickie said humbly: "Do you really? I think it means more to me to succeed than any other girl in the whole hospital. It really does!"

He glanced at her glowing eyes, her lips parted in fervor. He thought boyishly, "What a dear, lovely thing!" He said quietly: "Does it? We'll have to see that you get along, then—"

She was suddenly overwrought, feeling the blood sweeping up to her temples. She shut her eyes. And she thought, "Oh, isn't he glorious! Isn't he just glorious!"

They danced together again. Chickie was silent. She didn't look at him. He was so handsome—so kind. For some strange reason she wanted to cry.

Hours later when she lay very quiet, yet wide awake, she said to herself: "He's like him—" She corrected this, "Like I thought he was!" And she meant, though she didn't know this, that David Ramm was the ideal she so fervently worshiped, thinking she had it in Barry Dunne.

There was a physical similarity in the beautifully sculptured heads: in the strong, slender hands.

David Ramm came to the hospital every day, Chickie watched him with awe: with an odd gratitude because he did so many gentle, beautiful things.

Once there was a girl—very young, very pretty—who had been knocked down by an automobile. Her face was horribly torn. David labored over her mouth as though he was bound to turn it out a work of art.

But the girl had an inkling that she was hopelessly disfigured. She didn't cry about it, but her eyes haunted Chickie.

One morning Dr. David stooped down and said to her: "We'll be all right, Susie. We did a good job. We'll be able to smile as sweet as ever."

The girl's eyes filled with the funniest tears—half laughing. Chickie wanted to say: "Oh—you're glorious—do so much good—make people look like that!"

He happened to glance at Chickie then; saw her dark eyes dewy, uplifted—a rapt smile on her face. He turned quickly to the next bed.

One afternoon toward April Chickie was waiting at the corner for Wildie. She used to call him over the telephone. Then Jennie would open the door and he would come bounding down Twenty-second Street knowing where to find her. To-day there was a small box tied to his collar—one of those brown boxes with two enormous chocolates in them. This was a little trick of Jonathan's.

As Chickie untied the box and Wildie waited for his share some one passed, saying with a laugh: "Give us a bite?" It was Dr. David. Chickie stood there with the dog's head in her hands. She laughed and flushed. To David she looked so young, so like the Spring—fascinating girl. He too touched Wildie's head.

"Whose is he? Wonderful fellow, isn't he?"

"Indeed, he is. And he's mine. Jake gave him to me. He's the very best friend I have."

"Who—Jake or the dog?"

"Both—"

"So? I suppose you're going over to Jake's party next Saturday?"

"Oh, no—"

He glanced down sharply: "I thought you'd be there. Why not?"

She laughed uneasily: "Oh—being as I'm a woman with a purpose, I don't step about much on high."

"Don't you take any recreation?"

"Ho—me and a dog has lots of good times."

"You like theaters, I suppose?"

"Yes—somewhat."

He gave her a questioning look: "Might we go together some night next week, Miss Bryce?"

She flushed: "Well—well—I'd like it. I better not. We're to have a quiz— Oh, I think I better keep to my rule, and that says I'm not to go out nights—ever."

She felt very pale saying this and half feared to glance at him. He said in a puzzled way: "That's very remarkable—"

A few weeks after this incident Jake came to take her for a ride. As they walked down the long corridor Dr. David came toward them.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE GLASS HOUSE

THE doctor's eyes rested on Chickie with a half-amused flicker. "Shouldn't a young nurse be studying for a quiz, Miss Bryce?"

Chickie colored, but Jake hunched his head with a rollicky: "A young nurse is doing just as she should! Shouldn't a young doctor mind his p's and q's?" He held Chickie's elbow, looking down with a challenging, possessive pride.

She felt a trifle ruffled, but answered: "Oh, the quiz is quizzed, and this, you see, is just an afternoon!"

They spoke a moment together. When they were in the car Jake tucked a robe about her, for it was a sharp, brilliant day with a snap in every breath. He looked into her face, his black eyes teasing: "So, ho, my dear! A man's a man for a' that, eh?"

She pretended not to understand. Jake said: "Now, look here, my sweet, young friend, you ain't stupid. And you wouldn't keep secrets from Mr. Munson, would you?"

"He asked me to go to a theater, Jake. I told him I never went out nights except with my dog."

Jake burst out laughing: "So that's what I am, is it?"

"I meant my very best dog. He saw him one day. But now he will think I didn't tell the truth."

"Let him—the stripling! He'll only know you didn't wish to go—"

"But that wasn't it—"

"Oh—ah! Then you wanted to go with him, Helena? Why didn't you, then? You can have friends, can't you? It would be perfectly right for you to go, if you wished it."

"I don't. Oh, really—I want to be left alone—except for you, Jake. But, just the same, I'd like to tell graceful and clever lies and never be caught in them."

"Don't let them catch you—be smart, my dear. Shrug and say you've changed your rule. Say you change very quickly and never can bet on yourself from one day to another. So—

you never make dates, being as you may not feel like keeping them when the time arrives!" Jake was in an irrepressible and joyous mood.

But he stopped abruptly and studied her: "Helena, are you getting lonesome?"

"No—oh, sometimes I feel a stranger to myself. I wonder who this person is that seems to be I and walks so very so-so and is all quiet-like. I think you're princely, Jake, to bother with me—"

"Don't be so sure of me, Chickie. I'm not sure of myself. And don't think I'm princely. I bother because I want to—because you are you. Don't forget it—"

She didn't forget it. There were times when the thought of Jake troubled her deeply; when, for instance, she would find his eyes, half laughing, all wooing, looking into hers; or when his warm, magnetic hand pressed with such vivid touch on hers. Once she lowered her head—not thinking. He stooped and kissed her neck.

She didn't move or look at him. Then he forced her eyes up. And he was very white. He said humbly: "You're not angry, Helena? I didn't mean it—you know I didn't mean it. Would I, Helena? Please, now—your old friend—"

She answered then as now: "I do you wrong, perhaps. I shouldn't let you come, Jake. It's weak in me, isn't it?"

He laughed, exuberant again: "Do me plenty of wrong, Helena. I can stand it—"

"But just the same . . ."

"Now, look here, Miss Bryce, would you give the man the boot for one offense? Answer me! Why have you grown so serious?"

A soft, pensive laugh: "Shall you like to go on like this years and a day, Jake? And when I'm a nice wrinkled old lady and talk in a piping voice, will you still be around to give me a ride?"

"That I will! But listen, Helena, the day is enough. You don't know the future—no more do I, though I've many the hunch of late!"

"I do know it—as sure as the sun's on high! I know it exactly for I'm making it myself—every last minute of it."

He held her hands quietly, looking at their white, tapered fingers: "Pretty little hands for such a job, Helena, dear. If you're making your own future completely you must be making

the future of the entire world. Don't you know that? For you never know at what point the life or the thought of another will rush into and transfigure your own. You can't make the future, Chickie—nor can any of us. We can only make our acceptance of it as we will. Your thought can't stop the tide from sweeping in, or the earth from shaking. But if the tide sweep you, you can strike out and swim; or throw up your hands and drown. You have free choice not to make the tides but to meet them. Isn't it enough?"

"No! How did we get talking of this? I only meant to say, Jake," she became embarrassed and finished weakly: "Well, that you've been mighty good to me—"

He laughed, digging his elbow against her arm: "And you don't want to lure me along with any false hopes, eh? Being as you're ninety-nine and settled you don't contemplate making any changes, eh? I get you—let be as is!"

Towards the end of the week, Chickie was waiting one morning for a car. She was going downtown to buy a pair of shoes and she had chosen this hour that she might not meet any one and also because she was on night duty now.

David Ramm was just getting in his machine. He drove to the corner and leaned out with a friendly: "I'll take you down, Miss Bryce."

When she got in he asked her questions about her work, her opinions, where she had been to school. Then he said suddenly: "Is Jake the only one for whom rules may be broken?"

"He's a very old friend."

"Now—not as old as all that, Miss Bryce—"

She laughed: "Yes, he is—he knows my father and my mother and where I live and what we eat for dinner. Besides he has a lot of very useful information . . ."

"So have I. You don't really mean that you never go out nights? You haven't let them scare you into that, have you?"

"Oh, they don't try to scare us. We have a late pass—"

"Once a week— And you need it. You can't keep fit for your work if you don't have a little change—"

She said softly: "Well, I'll tell you. Doctor David—"

He gave her a surprised look and grew faintly red. She went hurrying on, with a shrug as though she were in the habit of accosting every one by their first name: "It suits you. That's my way. I call people as I choose. David is a much

better name than 'Ramm.' That sounds harsh. Besides 'David' is in the Book of Kings—"

"And he slew a giant, didn't he?"

She gave a little, mocking laugh, for it was a bright, sunny morning and she felt glad: "Oh, he did many things that other Davids may not!"

"You read a great deal, Miss Bryce?"

"Yes—sometimes. When I was away I read hours every night—"

"And lost your taste for company?"

"No—only books are so agreeable. One can close them at will."

He looked at her, musing. She seemed extremely young—very sweet because of a sadness that dwelt on her pale, beautiful mouth.

"And people aren't, Miss Bryce? You've found them unpleasant? Aren't you a little young to love your own company so much?"

"Oh, no—it's not that. I'm fond of people. Oh, very. But I just want to get started well in this work. It's altogether different from anything I ever did before," she laughed, "and I want to be as expert as you are in your line—"

"Expert—what do you think I am—a painless dentist? We're not experts—none of us—" Then he began to tell her of clinics in Vienna and marvelous experiments conducted there. . . . He said she would enjoy the life on the continent. He talked in a soft, musical tone, but as though he were ready to cease at any moment; as though he feared to thrust himself—

Finally he broke off. She said, excited: "Go on—what happened then—did the girl live—"

He said boyishly: "I'll tell you the next time I see you! I know a great many such tales—"

She was stirred and uneasy, and when she was buying her shoes kept thinking of his tone; of his musing eyes. Pictures and colors were in her mind.

That night she thought of many things. It was mysterious and sometimes a little terrifying—the long, quiet watch through the night hours. She was glad when the green lights flashed; glad when the patients wanted water, wanted a pillow straightened—she had thirty of them. They kept her busy.

As she walked through the ward she could see her image

in the glass partitions. It was as though many shadows of herself came out to meet her. . . . Frightening—that—

The flippant Chickie of a few years back—ah, fancy her, staying up all night, changing packs, giving medicine. Or even the Chickie of a year gone, so buried in her own heartbreak—

She thought to-night as her many shadows passed: "Who are you? What are you going to be? Oh, I wonder what?"

She was disturbed, too—remembering the meeting of the morning. Would Dr. David find out about her? What would he think—what would all these people think?

Suddenly she was afraid. What good did all this concealment do when she lived in the perpetual fear of detection?

Was the world any kinder than in Hester Prynne's time? How? Why, it was even better to have that scarlet letter right out—sewed on one's dress and be done with it.

Because when people learned they were just as relentless as in that time a hundred years ago . . .

And all the pretense was no better than a glass house she had builded to hide in. At any moment it might crash upon her.

She would take no more chances! Too menacing—she had too much to lose. She dared not lose—no matter what Jake might say the future would be hers. She was going to make it as she wished!

CHAPTER XXX

RESOLUTION

Mary's little girl sat on Chickie's lap. It was a dainty creature, with dimples and smiles and winsome lights in its blue eyes. Mary adored her daughter. But it always touched her to pain when Chickie held the child. She had a sense of guilt, as though it were wrong for her to have all this happiness and Chickie so little. And she imagined a great hurt in Chickie's heart.

To-day she said abruptly: "Are you resentful, Chickie? Does it make you wild to think, sometimes?"

"Not now. I'm satisfied. I'm interested—"

"You see a lot of Jake Munson, don't you?"

"Somewhat."

"And others?"

"There are no others."

Then Mary came over and sat on a stool at Chickie's knees. She said aimlessly: "Isn't she pretty? I'm glad the girl got the dimples. Her hair is lovely, like yours, Chickie." Then sharply: "But there will be others. For you, Chickie—of course. You have a right to expect it—"

Chickie was buttoning the baby's shoe. She kept on doing this. She gave an odd, wistful laugh: "Why need there be another, Mary? I'm going my way alone. Yes, I am—I don't want anything to spoil it—nothing shall—here take your lovely child, and don't worry about your weak sister—"

Walking away from Mary's, Chickie said to herself suddenly: "I'm more alone here in a way than I was in the south—I'm more cut off—"

She had resolved on this—shunning even careless attentions. Jake was away and for six weeks she had not seen David Ramm.

One night when she was on duty from 4 until midnight a rather spectacular thing happened. A patient, who was a severe abdominal case, grew suddenly worse. The internes

consulting over her decided that an immediate operation was necessary. One of them said to Chickie, "Call the chief."

The woman was a patient of Dr. Ramm's. He said in his soft, musical tone: "I'll be right over. Get her ready, Miss Bryce—"

This excited her like a call to aid. It was her duty to prepare the woman for the operation. She did it with feverish intensity—all but praying with each move that she made. It was midnight when the patient was taken to the amphitheater where everything was ready, and, as if by miracle, the nurses and internes waited.

Chickie was off duty. She wanted to see this operation. She went down the corridor. Another girl in her own class was also free now. This was Irene Underwood. She said to Chickie: "What's up? Well, I'll go with you—"

It was the first night operation Chickie had attended. She could look down directly at the work. She was breathless and gripped her chair as though the instruments were in her own hands and the incision hers to make.

She felt a faint heat—then it seemed to her that the doctor was a machine who worked noiselessly with inspired swiftness. She heard his voice—heard him swear—softly—saw his eyes tense—his hands moving with incredible delicacy. . . .

For an hour they went like this, dramatic—sure; his face had a lean, brilliant look as though he were pouring out his energy. It seemed to Chickie that he worked over this woman as though it were a mother or some one dearly loved.

Then he threw off his apron, leaving the internes to finish. Chickie was spent—her hands moist and riveted to the chair.

Miss Underwood said: "I want to ask him something. Come, there's nothing more to see."

Chickie answered: "It's too late—it's after one—"

But they passed him as he went through the office and Miss Underwood said: "I didn't quite understand what you did there—"

He stopped, bowing to them. Then he took up a piece of chalk and made a drawing on the blackboard. He was very willing, very anxious for them to understand.

Miss Underwood asked questions but Chickie listened. He looked directly in her eyes: "Do you get it, Miss Bryce?"

"Well—a little—"

"Look here—" He made a new figure—went through it all again.

Chickie said fervently: "Oh, yes! I see; wonderful—"

He was still looking at her—a flicker in his eyes: "So—all right?"

She flushed: "I guess it was—"

He nodded.

Chickie said to Miss Underwood: "He'll be on duty again at 8. I don't see how they stand it—"

"Humph—but I still don't understand why he did it that way—Dr. Oakum wouldn't have—" Miss Underwood was one of those persons whose knowledge is like a poison oak or some other itch—bothersome and very much on the surface. She always had an opinion. Quite frequently this opinion differed from the doctor's. This never deterred her from expressing it.

Now she said: "Dr. Oakum is more clever—don't you think so?"

"I don't know—"

"Well—Ramm is a friend of yours, isn't he? You knew him before you came in?"

"No—"

"Is that so? I heard he was. You go out with him, don't you?"

"No—"

"Hazel Standard saw you—"

Chickie shrugged. She was used by now to a dozen people keeping tab on her. It was like a big family and every one knew when you bought a new pair of shoes, when some one sent you a box of candy, and especially if some one called to take you out.

It was very chatty, all this comparing and quizzing. Every girl's friends were catalogued. If she were pretty and went out with a shabby escort, some one would say, with a sniff: "Great to be popular! As for me, I'm particular!" If the man were handsome, the comment was equally caustic: "Men—what can you expect—"

Now Chickie said: "He saw me waiting for a car and gave me a lift—"

Miss Underwood smiled, and said in a drawl: "Oh, is that so? I like surgery. When I graduate I'm going in for it. I suppose you are, too—"

"I haven't thought of it—"

"Well—I imagine you will—"

Chickie wondered why she said this; why she should twit her about a chance meeting.

But she dismissed it carelessly. She lay awake a long while going through the operation, wondering if the woman would recover. How unreal to be climbing into bed at 2 o'clock in the morning; to have stayed up on this strange adventure, to be so undisturbed now at the sight of blood—of flesh opened—

The woman was young enough. Chickie wondered about her family; who had sent her here? Was it some one who loved her a great deal? How did Dr. Ramm come to know her? Would she die? Or would that difficult operation save her life? Did she want greatly to live?

She went on duty early next day. She was restless and as concerned as though the patient's life lay in her hands. She felt a thrill, finding the woman alive . . . a greater thrill in waiting on her.

At 11 o'clock that night Dr. Ramm came in. He said quietly: "How is our patient?"

Chickie was startled and said: "Not worse. Isn't she all right?"

"Well, isn't she?" He went over and looked at the woman. Going out he said to Chickie: "Are you on duty all this week at this time?"

"No—I go on in the morning to-morrow—"

"That's good—I have an important thing on for Saturday afternoon. I'd like you to see it—"

"An operation?"

"Several of them— Will you come?"

She answered, mystified: "Yes. Not here?"

"No—down the line. I'll have to take you. That's all right, isn't it?"

She said uneasily: "I suppose so—of course."

CHAPTER XXXI

IDEALS

"You know where we're going, Miss Bryce?"

"Well—do I?"

"To the Stanford track meet. It ought to be great—"

She was surprised and showed it. He asked: "Don't you like that?"

"Why, yes—yes, I do—" But in the next hour as she passed down the white, silent ward she could hear her pulses thump. When she reached her room she was panting.

Myrtle was asleep. She had forgotten to open the window. The air was heavy, like a solid.

On Chickie's dresser was a large piece of cake and a note: "Dear Bryce—wonderful cake your mother sent down. Too bad you weren't here. Knew you wouldn't mind, so I helped myself and Gates. Saved you some—"

Another time this would have spurred Chickie to a sharp irritation. Now she picked off a bit of the thick chocolate icing and stole softly to open the window. A rushing like a wind was in her thoughts—a still excitement.

She had a distracted feeling as though some one whispered: "Now—well—you've done it, haven't you! Never satisfied!"

She saw herself driving down the peninsula with David Ramm—making a fine pretense of gayety. She stirred the sand in the window box with her finger, biting her lips to keep back a great wave of sorrow for herself.

She remembered the thrill Jake's first invitation had given her; and the wild brightness that sang in her thoughts that distant Sunday when for the first time she had driven down the road to sit beneath a tree. She could have wept now that all this was irrevocably closed.

But when she was seated next him and he looked young and very pleased with an almost teasing light in his deep, searching eyes, she felt a sudden lightness of spirit. She

laughed with a sparkle of impudent flippance. "You seem quite human, Doctor David. But did you know I stand in awe of you?"

"Of course I do. I mean that you shall—"

"Ho!" Her mood touched with recklessness. One hour—a gay, stolen hour—why not? If she wanted to laugh now—well, she was just going to! She said lightly: "Now, tell me—did that girl in Vienna die? And what are all those other tales. I would be entertained!"

He talked easily. Had she ever been to a track meet? She was learning to play tennis, wasn't she? He'd seen her on the court. Good thing.

It was long since she had been on a jaunt like this. It stimulated her like a wine. When they watched the sprinting he was taut as steel. In the hundred yard dash he picked out a chunky fellow, saying tensely: "I used to run. He'll win. I'll bet on him!"

The runner started with a dashing brilliance. In the last second he was outstripped. David stood up and shouted. When the boy lost he snapped his fist with a soft: "Damnation—damn!" Chickie burst out laughing.

She felt very friendly—untroubled. When he said, "Thanks for breaking your rule, Miss Helena, we'll do it again," she answered breezily, "Yes—let's!"

Alone she was startled at her coolness as though she had suffered some lapse. Finally she thought, "I can't go through life ignoring every one. I can have a day like this now and then. I'll have to—"

She was certain of her power to keep this or any friendship utterly impersonal—utterly in her own control.

It was easy with this David Ramm because in his work he was absorbed and selfless as some inspired machine. For weeks at a time he had no other thoughts.

Chickie used to wonder about him as though he were a new species of being. She contrasted him with herself and flushed with humility. One day taking a walk with Wildie she thought, "Did he ever do anything he was sorry for? I suppose not!"

She was confused and ashamed even wondering this. No—men like he were not buried in their own petty, wild desires. They weren't loafing about waiting for Life to present them with some glowing gift.

They were big—noble—above passion and meanness; even above human yearnings. Chickie had yet this outlook of the girl eager to exalt an ideal; to embody it in one who seemed to have the touch of glory. Then to drop on her knees and worship.

Incidents stood out luminous in her mind. There was a little boy of nine—game little youngster. His hand was mangled. David tried to save it. He worked as though he meant to fashion new fingers. In the end it had to be amputated.

Chickie saw the operation. She felt like crying. The doctor's face was pale. She had never seen him work so silently—without a word; never saw his eyes so warm. That afternoon she met him and spoke of it. He said, through his teeth: "Ah, damn! Why does a thing like that happen—great little kid, too. Hate a thing like that!"

Another time Chickie was on night duty in the men's ward. There was a very gentle boy about eighteen in a cast. The cast was split so that the patient lay in it as in a half shell. Unexpectedly he became delirious and tried to spring from the bed.

Chickie was frightened, finding herself unable to restrain him. She called the patient in the adjoining bed. Then with a kind of inspiration grabbed up the other half of the cast that was standing near the wall—set it in place with tape.

The following night Dr. David walked into the ward. He said, "Put it here, little nurse!" and held out his hand. Her heart leaped.

One afternoon he asked her to take a ride though the park. Before leaving the hospital she visited the maternity ward because of a case that drew her with a cruel fascination. Two weeks previously the ambulance had been called one night to get a young girl reported to have been seized with a violent and very sudden case of appendicitis. The girl was fifteen—an overgrown, country type. She lived with three brothers and kept house for them.

They were aghast when a child was born. The oldest brother, a hard-working, well-meaning fellow, came to the supervisor. He said it never dawned on him that his sister was even old enough to worry about. He blamed himself. They should have looked after her better. And now he and his brothers didn't want the girl's life ruined. They wanted

the child quietly disposed of—they wanted its birth kept entirely unknown.

So they took their sister home and left the little child. It was a boy—beautifully formed, large. Chickie touched its hands. They were warm. And to her dismay, her eyes filled with tears. Make this tiny thing take the penalty. Run away and leave it—how dared people do such things? Oh—the selfishness that doesn't think—

She began to tremble and abruptly walked out of the nursery. Getting into the machine, she was completely unnerved and didn't look at David Ramm.

Yet she had a wish to pluck his sleeve; to say: "I don't wonder the world is harsh sometimes to me and that girl. But what do you think—"

And this wish to have some word from him mastered her. She told of the baby left like that.

He said carelessly: "Yes—I know it."

"Do you see how a mother could do it? I should think the torment would be crucifying. Shouldn't you think she'd wake up in the night and wonder where it was; if it was turning pretty; if people were kind to it—"

He looked down at her with a half mocking amusement: "Well, Miss Helena, do you suppose that girl is afflicted with an imagination? She'd probably not have got into this if she were a high strung type, or if she could visualize much."

She winced: "You mean it takes a coarser type to do these things?" Then swiftly: "I suppose that's the answer. Yes. A girl with any strength and fineness just can't do such things—"

"Oh—that's rather sweeping. I was only considering the majority of cases that come to open attention. Some very exceptional women have had children without marriage. Are you able to believe that, Miss Bryce?"

"Well—suppose they are exceptional before—do you think they can go through such an experience without irreparable hurt to their own natures? Won't they always be less because of it?"

He considered this and frowned. She waited in a flaming, suppressed eagerness as though the answer meant her doom.

"I'd say it depends on the individual. For a man or for a woman the wrong in such an act is the damage they do to their own ideals. If a girl feels that she's degraded; if she

can't look herself in the face because of it—then it's tragic and may be hopeless."

"Do you think it's different if she loves?"

"Isn't it? You can't set down any hard and fast rules, can you? If a girl loves it's mighty pathetic, I'd say.

"Then there are other types that take an experience such as this as a matter of fact just as they take their meals. I've known Europeans to regard it so."

She sat down very low and looked out to where the acacias drifted their golden plumes. She said breathlessly: "That's terrible, though—that leaves us no beauty—none at all—"

He answered in the same quiet tone: "I believe you're right. Why should one cheat himself?"

She shivered—cheat one's self— But if one did—could they ever make it right—

She started to ask this question and grew hot and ended with a high falsetto laugh—

CHAPTER XXXII

TRIUMPH

JANINA came out often to see her. One Saturday afternoon they went over to Alameda for a swim. They lay on the sands. Chickie brooded with a serious wonder on her own interest in life. She thought, "The sun is warm—I love it," and she was even a little dismayed finding a glow and a lilt in her heart.

Janina said, "You're almost beautiful, Chickie."

"I thought I always was, Janina."

"And you're interesting now."

"Why the diagnosis?"

"I wondered if you knew it." Janina stretched her long arms and yawned. "After all, Chickie, why should we grouch at the tools life uses as long as she makes a neat job of us in the end?"

"Yes—but suppose the tool slips and we're marked instead of made?"

Janina shrugged. "That's the fault of the clay if it can't react; not the fault of life."

Chickie traced a name in the sand. She thought of herself, then swift contrasts with other girls whose fate was harsher—Elena Castenada and that one who had brothers but who left her baby. She said: "That's not true, Janina. Life can be too ruthless and you can't react. . . ." She told Janina these incidents.

Janina listened. Her black eyes were hot, her lips curling. "Poor trash! I wish I had a child by the first man I loved!"

"Oh, Janina! Would the child thank you?"

Janina's white teeth gleamed; her cheeks grew pale under the stress of emotion.

Chickie said: "That's the cruelty of it—making a child pay—"

Janina rolled over slowly. "People revolt me at times. They're such incorrigible hypocrites. They'd rather have a dead cat's liver wrapped up in tissue paper than a pulsing

human heart served raw. God save appearances! Why should the child pay?"

"It's the way the game is played to-day—"

"By a world that is still in the bully stage—remember that!" Janina got up with a laugh. Her eyes glinted. She had a high, challenging look—thin and muscular in her black bathing suit, her striking face upraised. "Even so, I wish I had it!"

Chickie felt a thrill of admiration.

On the boat coming home they took the stairs to the upper deck. Passengers were hurrying down both gang planks. Janina caught Chickie's arm giving her a sudden push. It was too late.

They came face to face with a group of beautifully dressed girls who were laughing and excited . . . one of these had gold hair and blue eyes. She wore a stunning wrap of crêpe bordered to the hem with summer ermine. She had a black beauty patch on her chin.

Chickie noted this with a stark precision. She felt her life stopping, then she was aware of Janina speaking, of Janina saying, "Hello, Ila—" and of herself smiling, and then of bowing with exaggerated grace. . . . They were walking through the cabin to the front of the boat. It was a warm day, but Chickie's teeth knocked as with cold. They found places near the rail.

Janina folded her arms. Presently she said: "You carried that off like a princess."

"Where are they, Janina? Was that Bess Abbot with her?"

"Yes. They're sitting at the other end."

"And talking of me!"

"Don't you ever believe it! She was the one confused—I'm glad of that. Did you know they have a son? And three months old."

"I didn't know it."

"And Papa Moore is building them a home in San Mateo—"

Chickie looked out at the water, at the sea gulls with their white, shiny breasts swooping down to grab at a crust thrown by a little boy. She listened to Janina with a remote quiet. She wondered why the doings of these people once so vital had now little power to pierce.

She said suddenly to Janina: "They are like people in another world."

There had been a time when Chickie wondered if the thought

of her troubled him; when she hoped that it did. Now she wanted no claim, even to his remorse.

Sometimes, as the weeks, then the months, flew by and she became more absorbed in her work; when she would sometimes spend hours studying, she wondered how much of her old self was left. She would take a bit of her flesh between her fingers and pinch it. All new cells, perhaps—none of them in existence a few years ago—

One night she walked up to the hill at Twenty-first and Sanchez. Here she had sat that hour of wild despair, for she knew that life had overtaken her. Now she drew Wildie's head to her elbow. She said, "A long time, dog—isn't it?"

Yet she was astonished at this quiet—astonished when she found herself laughing and at the zest she was forever finding in this new life. Once only grief had seemed of moment; now the littlest trifles uplifted her. She did well in a quiz, or she wrote a paper that was praised; she was beside herself with joy.

Finally she went to the theater with Jake and to a concert with David. It was a kind of ordeal for her. All the while she steeled herself saying, "No matter whom I meet—no matter who—I'm not going to care. Nothing can hurt me but my own thought—nothing."

Yet she was childish enough to regard it as a special kindness in Providence when she met no one.

She said to Jake, "I'm all shaking inside."

His hand tightened on her arm; the red smile flashed. He whispered: "If all of us shook that should shake, my darling, Lord save the universe."

She was grateful to Jake because he seemed proud of her. She told him all her triumphs; all the bright chatter about the hospital.

"An old man told me he kept on living just to see me from day to day. Now what do you think of that, Mr. Munson?"

"Lucky for him he's not a young one—that's all."

"And Mrs. Wilton, who's been there for years, asked me to give her a kiss!"

"My God—did you?"

In her senior session her marks were very high. She and Irene Underwood were both tremendously interested in surgery. Irene said to Phyllis Stone, Chickie's friend: "Bryce is in love with Ramm. That's her interest!"

Then Chickie was given a preference over Irene. She was allowed to scrub for the minor operations. Irene said right to her: "Why do you suppose you were chosen?"

"I don't know—chance, I guess."

But Chickie knew that it was because she had studied harder, because success was not merely of the moment for her. It was life.

Jake insisted on celebrating this achievement with a dinner. Then he drove her out to that bluff that crowns Ninth Avenue, that looks down over the wistful eucalyptus and out upon the sea—even upon the far-off Farallones. The old rock crusher stuck out gaunt and desolate at their feet.

She said suddenly, "Oh, do you know, Jake, once I thought I could never look at stars again?"

He slipped his arm about her, took her hand. She glanced up, her eyes misted. "You were so good to me."

"To myself."

"But it seems queer that I should be happy—and I am, but in a different way—"

"Being a different person now, my dear. Helena, what do you plan?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"Well, you've proven yourself to your own satisfaction, haven't you?"

"I don't know about that. . . ."

"Now, don't lie! You're all stuck up about it—"

She laughed: "Because I never thought I could—"

He took a deep, long breath—closed his hands on hers. He said hoarsely: "What do you think of me, Helena?"

"You know—Jake! Why, that you're just the most gorgeous person in the world, mostly—"

He kept looking at her hands and pressing them: "You know, I'm going away for a while, Chickie—"

"Yes—but you're coming back—"

"Maybe—" He sat forward a little. He stooped down and looked into her face, the rich, dark eyes touching hers with exuberant fire. She trembled, and suddenly tears were warm on her lids.

Then Jake's arms closed about her and he said: "Helena darling—little white darling—do I go alone?"

CHAPTER XXXIII

JAKE SPEAKS

JAKE's eyes, so near to hers, were warm and flashing; his mouth smiled: "Answer, Helena! Do I go alone?"

"What do you mean, Mr. Jake?"

"What do I mean? That I love you—I want you. Yes, I do. Quick, put your arms around me—oh, you can—you love me a little. Talk, Helena."

She kept her head down so that the sweetness and the white purity of her features that had always drawn him was now infinitely winning, and he wished to put his lips against her throat.

"Helena, dear, you like your old friend Jake, don't you? Look at him, please. Do you like him a little?"

"Do I? I think he's just most glorious!"

"Then will you marry the man, Helena?" He laughed and made her eyes meet his. "You can make him finer nor silk!"

There went a trembling and a sudden wild passion of gratitude through every pulse. She said: "Oh"—and then, half crying—"You are kingly, Jake . . ."

"And what does that mean, Helena? Will you have me—quick—God bless you and out with it!"

"Oh, no—"

"No?" His face grew very pale, and the hands clasping hers shook. He asked, in a husky, quiet tone: "Why won't you, Helena?"

She was faint because of a panic in her heart, and the sudden burning of old, crushed fires. She said: "Don't talk to me of this, Jake. Oh, it seems so strange. And I never thought—I never dreamed you felt so—"

"I do, Chickie. I've known it a long time. . . . Listen to me now, won't you?" He was smiling and vivid again. "I've thought it all out, your side as well as mine. What chums we are, Helena, dear, and what good times we have. You enjoy them. Yes, you do. And I can give you everything you want—things you always should have had—"

Gayety, like a trumpet note, came into his voice: "Why, Helena, dear, I can even be what you might want. I'll let you teach me! You've more than half done it already—don't you know that?"

She raised her chin, glancing long into the wooing, handsome face. Then she said with a proud, wistful pathos: "And now you think you want to marry me? Oh, really, Jake? But it's just the kindness in you—it's just the greatness!"

"It's the want of you, Chickie, and nothing else. Do you think I'm a boy and I don't know what I want? I've had time enough, God knows. I've watched you and hungered, wanting you more each day—"

"Now wait, my dear—" He reached over and drew her hands. "Wait—this is the first time your friend Jake ever spoke of marriage . . ."

She smiled with an attempt at lightness: "Then you better stop, Mr. Jake, because it would be sad if the first time should also be the last—" Her voice broke—"Oh—let us go on as we were. Wasn't it very pleasant? Oh, it's better—it's the only thing for me—"

"Why do you say that?"

"Because things in me are dead. It's not that I'm unhappy—"

"Nothing in you is dead, Helena, dear. Life is too strong to go down with one little blow. You are living enough for me. You are dear enough. So that's that. Why in a few months you will forget you ever grieved. I had an idea, Chickie, that we'd take a long trip—Europe, perhaps. You've never been there—new sights—a new environment—broadening out of all those prejudices of yours. Wouldn't you like that? Speak the truth, Helena?"

"You mean Europe?"

"I mean Europe and Jake—the two of them. . . ."

She raised her hand stealthily and wiped her eyes.

"You're not crying, Chickie? Now listen—why should you?"

"I don't know. Everything—I guess. And I'm thinking this, Jake—you may love me—oh, I think you do—no one could be so very magnificent otherwise, but underneath you can't really want to change. Why, Jake, and you made such fun of Nicky—oh, you are one to be free—always. You don't know what you offer! You can't. . . ."

He gave a humming, exultant laugh and a mockery was in his eyes. "Underneath I didn't want to change. Who told you that? But I am changed. The beaten ways have lost their zest and that's what one Helena Bryce did to me.

"Won't you let me talk, Helena? Of course, I'm one to be free—I have been free and blessed each day of it. They were rich and full. I may have regrets, but I don't know where they are. But I'm telling you the honest to-God truth—this freedom weighs now like a ton—like a hundred rusty chains. I want to be rid of it. For it keeps pulling me in old, worn-out paths and all the flowers are trampled.

"Helena, I ask you most politely, won't you take off the chains and let me start on a new road? Why—that would be a fine adventure. Why, it would be a gallant thing to know that my own white darling wanted me and wanted for me. I'd like that mighty well—"

She turned her hands in his. She looked up, pleading. "Why do you call me that name, Jake? It makes me want to cry—"

"Chickie! Why—do you mean that? But I will call it to you; I will shout it to you. You are that—you are better and finer than you ever were. Now, don't try to put me in a hole, my dear. I'll teach you a better way to look at things—much better. You are what you are and I am what I am because of all that is past—bad and good together. Don't you know that? If you like me now, you are liking the result of all my high days and my low days—

"And I love you for all that you are. Helena, some time ago I wouldn't have really wanted to marry you. I would have known that I would tire."

"Now—you think you won't, Jake?" She laughed. "Jake, do you think that you'll like slippers at a fire and some one rushing out to say, 'Take your rubbers! You better wear a coat'?"

"Are you going to say it to me, Helena? It will be a new sound in my ears. I tell you I've stepped with the best of them. I've gone out seeking and come in with my heart and hands filled. Those steps don't ring as they used to.

"I've always loved what cost me high; I've always wanted what no one else could buy. But do you know, Helena, you made me coin a new mintage—yes, you really did—

"Oh, come now—what do you say—an old dog—I know the way I want to go."

She remained silent, and he said softly: "Isn't my kind of love good enough, Helena dear? You want something better? You don't know how much I want you—how I want to hold you—I want your head right here. What do you want?"

"I want to win first, Jake. . . . I want to go clear up to the top—"

"You have. . . ."

"No, not yet. I want to do something big and by myself. . . ."

"Helena, that won't satisfy you. It won't. The beauties of life belong to you. Let me bring them. . . ."

He turned toward her then and she had never seen him look so kingly—never seen such vital exultance in all his face, as though its every feature spoke.

"Helena, put your arms about me—can you do that—please . . ." He stooped down to her—"Please—"

She put up her two hands—she clasped them against him. . . . He whispered with a humming lilt: "Kiss me—ah, my darling—won't you do that—"

She felt her life run high and swift with a warm, tender pain.

And she wanted to do what he asked, but she sat mute and trembling, only her hands against his heart. He covered them—she could hear his breath tearing heavily.

"Helena, do you mean that you can't? But you love me. A little. I know that you do. Raise your face. . . . Let me kiss you. I want it so."

She shut her eyes and tried to draw back all the tears, but they ran over. Then she raised her face and smiled—

Jake's arms crossed with a mighty passion about her. He pressed his lips on hers—long—with a slow tenderness.

Her breath drew back with a little faint sob.

"Helena, darling—you love me—tell me you do—"

"I do love you, Jake—oh, with a great love. But I can't do as you ask. No—never that again—"

He held her in silence. Then he took her face in his hands, kissed it again and again. "I can't take that. Helena—no—I can't take that—"

CHAPTER XXXIV

FAREWELL

THE thought of Jake remained like notes of a song in her heart. It whispered more of pain than gladness. She saw the rich face, smiling, turned to hers with a passionate tenderness, saw it grow pale when she gave that quick, pathetic: "Oh, no!" She trembled and wished to cry.

At the door Jake said, holding her hand pressed between both his palms: "Don't answer. Think it all over, Helena. Take all the time you want. Think of your side of things." Then with a laugh: "But give me the answer I want. Will you, little darling? You can."

She was still trembling when she opened the door of her room, praying that Myrtle would be asleep; that she wouldn't sit up sleepily and begin to talk. She wanted solitude now; wanted breathless quiet. Oh, there was much to think about!

Jake wanted her to marry him. He loved her for all that she was—even for all that had been. He said this and meant it. That seemed glorious in him; that filled her throat with tears. Wanted her now—really did—

Images of him, towering, exultant as he used to swing along Montgomery Street, the black, flashing eyes rejoicing in eager, half timid glances, came now into Chickie's vision. She remembered that Tuesday after her flight from Sausalito and he stood before her with his hat off, the rain glistening in his hair. How excited, how secretly thrilled she was, having this lofty fellow carry her off like that. And how he had listened with such relish to her flippant talk.

That was when her days were bright and free. He wanted her then; called her his little white darling. But he didn't dream of marriage.

It was a different Jake as she was a different Chickie who spoke to-night; a Jake who had gone his lighted way, snatching triumphantly of many pleasures, but who now, after much taking, found only a deeper wanting. He was a stroller seizing

at petals. Now he looked for a happiness rooted within; a something that would flower, yet endure.

He had the look of a boy about him when he said this—he wanted to know that another, and that other she, waited and cared and was always there. It drew Chickie. All that was giving; all of the mother in her took flame. She wanted to put her arms around Jake; bring him the gifts he asked. She felt, indeed, that great love for him.

But her mind turned blank and cold at the thought of marriage. She stood now at the window, staring into the shadowed gardens. She put her fingers on her lips where his had pressed. She said softly, with an aching astonishment: "He wants me—really does—"

And that made her eyes close because of a thankfulness—made her mind glow with the image of him.

She sat down on the window sill, waiting for this melting tide of feeling to ebb—waiting till her thoughts were calm.

It was summer now—two years and more since that January when Chickie's child was born; nearly three years since that May when Barry Dunne had left her. She had gone a long road.

She looked back at it now in this arousing moment—she could raise her head—look quietly at mountain tops and stars. She had a right to do this—a right to the proudness in her thoughts.

She was no longer conquered by a blasting and a cowardly shame. She measured her spirit with others and knew it was as sound; knew it was as pure.

Yet she could accept with resolute quiet a different path than other girls her age would take. She could feel a yearning for a tenderness and a great beauty of love. But she could also close her eyes swiftly with a frightened: "No—not for me!"

She wanted Jake's friendship; loved the glad hours they spent together. Even her thought would venture no further.

Withal, in the days that followed, his image was forever confronting her. Now she heard him say with a gallant tenderness: "I ask you most politely, will you take away my chains? You can make the man finer nor silk!"

Then she half wondered if she had a right to consider only herself, or if perhaps, with him wanting her so, she should take him—

Whenever this phase came uppermost she grew hot and faint.

In her inmost vision she felt that to marry Jake now would be surrender. It would be accepting his wealth, his position, his bigness and allowing these to do for her what she had determined to do for herself.

He could make the world accept her. She had dreamy pictures of herself on a steamer bound for Europe and Jake bending over her. Ah—his was a proud, fearless love. Much he cared for the whisperings, the shabby gossip, the hurt to his prestige. She would be his wife. He would make them bow!

He wanted to bring her all the beauties of life. He said he would make her way his way.

But she knew that, as Jake's wife, she would be the beloved and the pampered one. Gifts would be laid at her feet; her days would be filled with the thought of herself—Chickie and her wants.

Could she go back now to this pretty, shallow way? This bright road of self-gratification? She had walked it once with what peril?

And now, here in the hospital, she saw another way. She saw those who forgot that it was time to sleep, time to eat, time to grow weary. She saw one coming in the middle of the night and working silent hours to ease another's pain—this other even a stranger . . .

She wanted to fling her life out gloriously like that—do her part; have that brilliant, exalted light about her face. She wanted to go a bigger and higher road.

She couldn't quit now—no one should ask it.

Afterwards, when she had won—when she had climbed up and up—why, if Jake wanted her then—if perhaps his love endured—why, then, he could ask again.

Something like this she told him a few nights before he left.

He said to her: "Did I come too soon, Chickie, and that's the reason?"

"No—it's not that, Jake."

He had his arm resting behind her and he said, softly: "Tell me all you've thought. Come now—I'll have a few threads of hope!"

"Is it selfish, Jake, because I want to finish? This is the biggest thing I've ever tried. I would feel beaten to quit. . . ."

Her lips moved faintly: "Oh, you don't quite know—but there's no love in me—"

"Do you mean, Helena, that there's no love for Jake?"

"No—for any one. . . ."

He grew pale and quiet: "You love another, Chickie? No other at all?"

"No—"

"How much longer have you to go, then?"

"More than a year."

"Look up at me, Helena—you don't care if I kiss you—please—something to take away with me. And, listen—I'm going to Portland—I'll be gone a month, perhaps—or more. You're to write to me. You're to tell me everything you think. And then I'm coming back, Helena."

He laughed and drew her to him. And she remembered the look in his eyes—remembered the look on his mouth—"I'm coming back to you, my dear, and if you're going to make me wait—all right! I wait. Promise me this—don't give your heart to another, will you? I want it—I want it—"

He took her hands then and put them on his face. He laughed a little. "What do you think, Helena—you'll take me, won't you—"

She kept her head down, finding it hard to breathe. His lips moved over her hair. "Never mind, Helena, dear—you will. I can be as good as another. And for you, my darling—better. You don't know this. It's true. I know what you want better than you know yourself. I mean to be the one to give it to you. Remember that!"

CHAPTER XXXV

JEALOUS GODS

CHICKIE often wondered if her future would have been altered if she had not gone to the tennis court that day.

It was early afternoon, the hospital gardens soft and glowing with color. The figures moving in the court gave a dash of rhythmic vitality to the scene.

Irene Underwood and Kenneth Harmon, an interne, were playing. They played often together and were both skilled. Now seeing Chickie and Phyllis Stone waiting, they finished a set. Harmon said: "Suppose we play doubles?"

Chickie was new at the game. It gave her the keenest delight to swing out her arm; a childish thrill when she made a good drive. Now she laughed: "I don't think we can, Doctor Harmon, being as I'm a hopeless amateur."

"That's all right, I'm good," the interne offered cheerfully. "I'll make up for you. We'll try them out, anyway. How's that, Rene?"

Irene bounced a ball with her racket. Without looking up she answered: "All right with me—"

Irene and Phyllis took sides together. They won the first set, for Chickie, added to her inexperience, was extremely nervous.

Harmon said, "We'll win all the rest. Just gave you that for a teaser. Try this, Miss Bryce." He began very amiably to show Chickie a better serve. "Try it now—"

Irene said irritably: "Come—play the game!" Her eyes were sharp and excited.

Harmon laughed. "Just for that, let's beat them, Miss Bryce!" Chickie's nerves tensed. She tried out the new serve and, to her astonishment, aced her opponent. It was chance, but it passed for brilliance. "Do that again," Harmon called. "Great! Another lesson and we'll match you up with Molla!"

Irene missed another ball, became irritable and lost again; playing in wretched form. She lost two sets, and suddenly

flung down her racket. "Well, that's enough! I'm tired, and I hate doubles."

Harmon said to Chickie: "Try a set—just for practice."

He was quite a young man, blond and easy-going, but very conscientious in his work. Chickie became impressed with him first because of the care he gave to a Chinaman who had taken a great fancy to him and who suffered extremely. Old Charley said: "Him great fellow! Him stay, I nebber die. I tellem you! I know!"

The night he was dying he kept moaning: "You getem docky—getem docky—nebber die." At 2 o'clock in the morning Harmon came over to see him. The Chinaman's thin, claw-like hands dug into the interne's arm. His head nodded vaguely. He smiled. "What I tellem you—docky come—I not die!"

He passed without knowing it. Harmon remained a moment. He said to Chickie: "I wonder why he wanted to live—a good old fellow." She thought him very kind.

Now in his easy-going way—very quiet, yet very capable—he had her try out different twists, different serves. It was all new to her—all very exciting. Especially if she succeeded and he said amiably: "Great—a little more practice and you'll be all right." Finally he said: "Why don't you come out more often, Miss Bryce—come out to-morrow?"

Without thinking, Chickie answered: "I'd love that! Do you think your patience will last?"

"It's the longest suit I have."

Exercise brought into play all her stirring love of life. Going into her room, she laughed seeing the color race in her pale face, her eyes vivid.

She was getting into her uniform when Irene opened the door. She was in a kimono, her hair down. She sat on Chickie's bed and began to file her nails. "Have a good game, Bryce?"

"Well—you know how clever I am with the racket."

"Ken's a good teacher. He's been playing a long while. We were in grammar school when he gave me my first lessons."

"Oh—have you known him that long?"

"I should say I have. That's why I came into training—thought I might as well fill in the time till he finished his course—"

Chickie said in surprise: "Oh—I didn't know that—"

Irene drawled: "Well, it's not exactly been published." She

reached over and took a book from Chickie's table. It was a history of medicine that David Ramm had loaned her. Irene said casually: "Yes—we're old friends. Say, I saw this book here the other night. I'd like to read it. You don't mind?"

"It doesn't belong to me—"

Irene then looked at the fly leaf, saw the book plate. She said: "Oh, our friend David—you're getting along pretty well, Bryce, with that? He plays tennis. Why don't you invite him out? Ken and I will match you."

In the mirror Chickie saw Irene's sharp face with its small resolute mouth, its very alert eyes. She had the book opened and was now running her finger under the lines. Her cheek bones glistened as if they had been polished.

Chickie thought with surprise: "She's wild because I played with him. She's really jealous."

The next afternoon she didn't go to the tennis court. From a window she saw Kenneth Harmon waiting. She wondered if he and Irene were engaged. The incident seemed petty.

Toward the end of the week she and Phyllis were playing. Harmon came along. He said with a laugh, "I'll play the loser."

Phyllis watched for a while. Then she had to go on duty. Chickie became so uncomfortable that she said after one set: "I have an engagement. I'll have to stop now . . ."

"You've improved. Why didn't you come out? You haven't been around for quite a while. You need the practice. It's a great game when you get into it—"

"Or even when you're only on the edge. I love it—I've only been playing lately . . ."

"Well—you come out to-morrow."

"I can't—I don't know what my hours will be—"

"But you're not on nights now, are you?"

Chickie glanced up and found the blond, amiable face with a shrewd, understanding look about it. She said, hastily, "No—"

"We might go to a show—"

"I have several nights taken—"

"Well—so have I," but he smiled. "I'll speak to Irene about it—suppose we make it a party of four—"

She blushed: "I seldom go out, Dr. Harmon. You see my folks live near. I usually go home when I'm free."

He laughed: "I guess they'll spare you for one night, won't they? I'll fix it up with Irene. You'll come, won't you?"

"Well—all right—" She was already on edge and as she

went through the corridor kept reproaching herself: "Why didn't I say no. Well, why didn't you!"

And she met Irene on the stairs as she was going up to her room. Irene said softly: "Enjoy yourself, Bryce?"

Chickie said hastily: "Hello!"

Irene's sharp eyes narrowed: "Come out in the morning, Bryce—I'll give you a few pointers, too!"

Tuesday night Chickie was coming back from an early dinner with Jonathan and Jennie. As she went up the steps of the hospital she saw Irene and Norma Talbot hurrying out.

Irene wore Sophie Gates' fur coat and a smart new hat. Norma had on a new black silk cape. They seemed excited. Neither of them was aware of Chickie.

But as she watched them a subtle, warning flush crept into her thoughts. She smiled to herself.

The next morning she met Kenneth Harmon as she was going to her ward. He bowed rather stiffly. Then as if on a second thought he paused: "I saw you coming into the hospital last night, Miss Bryce."

She gave him a surprised glance: "Now did you!"

"You missed a great show—"

"What do you mean?"

"Just that. Do you usually break engagements at the last moment?"

"I don't understand—why, I don't understand—"

"You agreed on the date with Irene, didn't you?"

Color shot into her face. She looked at her hands, no ready answer coming.

"Didn't you know it was Tuesday night we were going to the show?"

"Oh—oh, I believe something was said about it now—I didn't know it was definite. Well, you see I haven't been around much except when I've been on duty."

His face had grown white:

"You weren't around Saturday or Sunday or Monday?"

She laughed: "Well—I'm sure I don't know. I'm very sorry!"

He said abruptly: "So am I. Perhaps I had better make my own arrangements in the future."

That night she and Irene passed each other on their way to the dining room. Irene looked as though she had been crying. When Chickie spoke she gave her a venomous look and didn't answer.

CHAPTER XXXVI

ACCUSATION

CHICKIE walked down the block and young Kenneth Harmon walked with her. She was very uncomfortable, answering his questions in a rambling, absent manner.

She was thinking: "Why is he here? He knows Irene never told me of the theater party. They quarreled over it—"

She was on her way home. Suddenly she said: "Wouldn't it be an odd world if, instead of talking, we read each other's thought and there was never a chance to lie?"

He answered quietly: "I think we read each other's thought considerably at the present time."

"Oh—do you?"

"Yes—well—" He switched the subject abruptly to a discussion of an operation David Ramm had performed that morning. He watched Chickie's face as he spoke. She became interested and forgot her stiff formality.

When they reached Mission Street, Harmon said: "What day is this? Thursday? Bean soup and pot roast."

"No, sir! Fat lamb stew and sago pudding. That's why I'm on my way home."

"Lucky you. Let's go along here and eat—"

"Ah, no. My friend Jennie will have T-bone steak for her darling child."

"Any chance of friend Jennie having two T-bones?"

"Well—I don't know about that."

He kept on walking with her. She wished with increasing annoyance that he would leave. Finally they reached the cottage. Jennie was in the garden. She had her apron filled with early roses.

Seeing Chickie, her soft, faded eyes lighted. She blushed when Harmon swept off his hat. Then she said quaintly. "Will the young man stay to dinner?"

Harmon laughed: "The young man will!"

It took Chickie off guard. She colored painfully, saying:

"Oh, really, Dr. Harmon?" but added swiftly, "Then let us go in—"

Chickie's homecomings were events. Flowers on the table; Jennie's bits of silver and all the pretty dishes gathered through many years. And Jennie was an artist in the cooking line. Even the bread and butter, after the routine of the hospital, had an exquisite flavor.

When Jonathan saw company, his eyes warmed—genial old fellow, loving the mellow things of life. He brought out all his company talk—oil stocks; early days in the city, his recent trip to Los Angeles. Then he told his flat company jokes, enjoying them hugely. He said naively: "Well, doctor, and what do you think of my girl? Will she make a good nurse?"

Chickie burst out laughing. Harmon's blond face grew red: "I think a great deal of her and also of your wife and of your dinner and of this most excellent pie!"

Jennie's ceaseless effort was rewarded. It was a homey, simple hour but all through it Chickie was disturbed. She kept seeing Irene standing at Harmon's chair, an accusing, venomous look on her face.

When he asked her to go to a lecture, she refused abruptly and to his apparent astonishment. "I thought you'd be interested, Miss Bryce," then he added swiftly: "By the way, did you refuse to go to the theater last Tuesday after promising that you would?"

"I didn't know anything about it, Dr. Harmon, if you must know! No invitation was extended to me. But it is such a trifle."

He shoved his hair from his forehead in a measured way, saying: "Of course, I understood that, Miss Bryce." But he was suddenly impatient and in a hurry to leave.

When he was gone Chickie went into the sun room. The air was dreamy with the breath of hyacinths. She sat in the dark, feeling herself impersonal, remote from life as a shadow.

What a pitiful thing it is that one person wishes to possess another! That one should want this absolute claim on another's spirit! But thoughts can never be chained. They exist only when free. Men and women have compelled physical loyalty, but no one of them has ever stayed the winging of a thought nor bound for long a mind that sought to go.

Chickie knew it well. Suddenly she remembered a noontime when one with gold hair and blue eyes drove up in an

automobile and he that then seemed god-like to her came from the building and sat at Ila's side. She remembered another time when the poem fell from his pocket. A pity for Irene Underwood gave her pause.

But when Irene followed her down the hall and into her room a few evenings later; when Irene gave her a sharp, withering look and said: "I shouldn't think you'd be starting things around here, Bryce!" When Irene said that Chickie's anger leaped white hot.

"I wonder what you mean?"

"Just that! I don't butt in on your affairs. I let you have the best of it in surgery. Now you keep your face out of mine!"

"If you're alluding to Dr. Harmon, Irene—don't worry about me. I'm not interested! I haven't any intention of butting in between you and him."

"As if you could! You haven't any intentions! Oh, no! I happen to know what you did Wednesday night. Don't do it again!"

"Well, you better speak to him about it, Irene. I can't prevent people from walking on the sidewalk just because I happen to be there."

"I suppose you can't prevent them from going into your house for dinner, either!"

Chickie winced: "No—I couldn't prevent it. My mother was in the garden. She asked him. He stayed because the food sounded good to him—not because of me!" She became suddenly indignant at the shabby interview and the rising shrillness of Irene's accusation. She said, hotly: "Why should you blame me for this, Irene? I don't want Dr. Harmon nor any other man, if you must know it!"

Chickie took a book from her table, turned the pages.

Irene came up and snatched it from her hands: "You think you'll pass it off like this, Bryce? See how far you get!"

She walked out of the room. From then on she refused to speak to Chickie. Norma Talbot also ignored her.

One night when Chickie came off duty at 12, Myrtle was sprawled on the bed, a magazine before her, a box of fudge Jennie had sent, open on a chair. She propped a pillow under her head, and, with a great air of relish, tossed the magazine aside: "So you're giving Woody a bad time of it, Bryce? I hear the engagement is off, thanks to you!"

"Was the engagement ever on?"

Myrtle had a high, wheezy laugh. She kept it up so long now Chickie wondered if she was choking. "Say, now—that's mean. Those engagements that maybe are and maybe ain't are the most dangerous kind to bust up. Too bad for Woody! She'll never get another chance."

In two or three days every one knew that Irene Underwood and Kenneth Harmon no longer played tennis together. Several times Chickie passed a group of girls. Talk stopped abruptly as she approached.

She felt this coldness as she felt the suspicion when Miss Alberta accused her of making the infamous drawing—more keenly because several of the girls who had been friendly with her were now vaguely resentful as though she had done them a personal wrong.

The night of the election for the staff of the Senior Journal an ominous thing happened. It was generally conceded that Chickie would be made editor. Several papers she had written in her classes had been read aloud because of their vivid yet simple expression. She was supposed to have a gift for writing.

The sixteen girls in the class, many of them in uniform, gathered in the lecture room. Groups were whispering—now and then a taut exclamation went vibrating from wall to wall. The chairman rapped for order.

Then Phyllis got up quickly and nominated Chickie for the editorship. She mentioned Chickie's long business training; her ability to type. She said: "We want our annual to be the best ever. Bryce has experience and she has ideas. We've heard some of them. She has the flash of genius to make the edition a howling success. I move that the nomination be made unanimous."

Before the last word was out Norma Talbot jumped to her feet. She flung her head back in challenge and without waiting for permission, burst out: "It takes more than the flash of genius to fill this position. The editor of the annual speaks for all of us. We are putting our prestige entirely in her hands and we ought to be sure that the class is represented by a member worthy to speak for the standards and the ideals of the nursing profession! We should be absolutely certain that the candidate can measure up on every score—we should choose

some one fitted for the responsibility. The candidate I propose is such a member. I nominate Miss Underwood—"

A bristling silence, then a hum, an excited protest. Norma remained standing.

Irene's sharp eyes were fixed on the wall, her lips parted and a strained, hot look was in her face.

Norma tried to go on with her speech, but Phyllis was shouting: "Sit down, Talbot—sit down, you're out of order. There is a motion before the house to second the nomination of Bryce."

Norma made a little rush to the table, saying as she went: "I move that the nomination of Bryce be withdrawn! There are reasons why she should not be elected to this position. I can state them."

As though from a bolt, every one sat upright, eyes pounced on Chickie. She sat like a statue, her thoughts freezing. She sat so and waited.

CHAPTER XXXVII

NEMESIS

She thought with a stony remoteness: "I should withdraw. I should get up and withdraw." Yet she remained silent in an obstinate abandon.

Her eyes were stormy and brilliant. They fixed on Norma and suddenly Norma faltered; suddenly she lowered her head. "I don't wish to do this. I'd rather let the matter rest. I'd rather leave it to Bryce. She knows what I mean—"

Things pounded at Chickie's heart; thoughts were a madness, but the grimness remained. No! She would not! She would not! And she sat there and stared at her accuser. And folded her hands.

Norma repeated, yet keeping her eyes averted: "I'll leave it to Bryce herself. . . ."

Phyllis shouted: "Good idea, Talbot! Leave it to Bryce! Leave it to us. We can get personal, too! We can state reasons why other persons aren't fit for office. Shall we? I say, shall we?"

Miss Blair, who was acting as chairman—a scrupulous, painstaking girl—now leaned over the desk, pleading for order, but a group of Chickie's friends kept chanting to a soft stamping of feet: "Vote, vote, vote—we want to vote!"

Miss Blair brought a book down with a bang: "Order—order! This class has been together nearly two years. Its members are well acquainted. All of us know Bryce—and all know Underwood. Let each judge for herself as to their fitness. This meeting shall not be turned into a brawl while I'm chairman.

"Are there any other nominations? Then let the voting begin. Let that determine the majority choice. Let pettiness end!"

Chickie was elected. The voting stood ten to six. It brought no triumph to her heart—nothing but a haggard chill— Did they know? Could they know?

In the middle of that night she awakened from a fluttering

sleep, her pulses going like lightning. Memory stalked gauntly. Irene Underwood had an aunt who lived in the Mission—on Howard Street. Twice Chickie met Irene walking there.

So! The aunt knew. The aunt had told it all! That was it and now the whole hospital was to hear.

Chickie wet her lips. She tried to push free from the smothering and the overpowering heat. She got up and stood at the window. She was standing there when Myrtle came in.

Myrtle was all breeze and excitement over it: "Say, wasn't that choice though! Cats—did you ever know the equal! As though every one couldn't see through a game like that. We should worry if Woody can't keep her gentleman friend!"

"Is that what she meant to tell, Myrtle? What makes you think so?"

"Of course it is! Hasn't she been blabbing it everywhere—the poor fish. What else has she got? She was going to make you out the throat-cutting vampire. Heartless jade, you!"

The impression became general. Irene Underwood was jealous of Chickie. This was her revenge. Feeling turned against Irene.

Chickie's alarm died. She began to make her plans for the annual. She'd show them who was worthy of their trust. It would be the biggest, the brightest, the cleverest thing—

One morning Miss Simonds sent for her. It was the first time Chickie had been to the office since her probation days. Hurrying down the corridor, she wondered what Miss Simonds wanted. Oh—perhaps to congratulate her on the election—not that exactly; but to make a few suggestions, to offer advice.

Or it might be to mention some vacancy in the department of surgical nursing—and Chickie was to strive for this; be ready for it at graduation.

She was always hoping for some brilliant opportunity like this. And Miss Simonds had watched an operation a few weeks ago. She had smiled at Chickie when they passed later in the hall. She had said: "You like your work, Miss Bryce?"

Chickie became excited at this elating prospect. How very gorgeous! She was flushed, entering the office.

Miss Simonds had a grave, white look. She motioned Chickie to a chair opposite her at a flat top desk. She held an envelope in her hand and kept running her finger back and forth over the edge. Chickie looked at her frank eyes. They were uneasy and harbored trouble.

After a long pause Miss Simonds said: "I am hoping very much, Miss Bryce, that you will be able to explain. I have called you here on a most distasteful matter. Now—if it turns out as I trust, we shall forget entirely this interview—"

Unconsciously Chickie's head raised. Irene, of course! And bringing that pitiful affair to the superintendent! She said, abruptly, "Yes?"

"An anonymous letter was sent to me some time ago, making certain accusations against you, Miss Bryce. Naturally, I paid little attention to it. Then rumors began to circulate among the students of your class. Are you aware of them, Miss Bryce?"

Chickie said, with a touch of dignity: "There are so many rumors, Miss Simonds."

"This one concerns you. It is very grave. Charges have been made. They are so damaging we were forced to look into them. Let me make sure, Miss Bryce—"

Then Chickie knew. She took a deep, noiseless breath. She put on a brave, flickering smile to hide the tightness in her throat.

"You are not married?"

The smile deepened for now a wave of heat swept up and half engulfed her. "Oh, no—"

"Were you ever married?"

"No—"

"Is it true that you had a child?"

Chickie looked straight before her. She pressed her palms on the table and she said in a strange, unnatural quiet: "Why yes—yes—"

"Then the charges are true?"

"Why, yes—"

Miss Simonds' color dropped visibly until her cheeks were a leaden white and her eyes stood out shocked and incredulous.

"Are you aware of the admission you are making, Miss Bryce?"

"Oh, yes."

"Your child is dead?"

"Ah—" Chickie's lips parted. They kept moving. Then she bit them harshly together. She said, looking at those strange white hands of hers, pressed against the table, "Yes."

"Can it be true also, Miss Bryce, that a question was raised as to the cause of its death?"

"No. It died."

"I understood there was a trial."

Chickie drew her hands to her lap. She was numb.

"Was there a trial, Miss Bryce? There was doubt as to the cause of the death? Do you not wish to answer?"

Then Chickie became excited and a little wild. She leaned across the table. She moistened her lips: "No! It died—there was no trial— An inquest, and it was proven! And every one knows that it died! The doctor testified. I brought it to him and said it was dead. It was weak, and he knew it would die. All that came out—the whole thing. There was no doubt left—there wasn't any at all!"

She moved back then, her hands quiet: "That's all—that's all!"

"Who was the doctor?"

"Dr. Emerson of Moppett. Why, you can write to him—you can learn it all—"

"How long ago was this?"

"Two years last January—"

"When you entered this hospital, Miss Bryce, you made no mention of this episode. Nor did your sponsors. You represented yourself as a girl of unblemished character. You really gave fraudulent references—"

"I had to—"

"No—I don't think so. I'm sorry. Very, very sorry. I would gladly aid you, Miss Bryce. But you did a grievous wrong coming here under false colors. You have preferred your interest to the interest of the institution—"

"Oh, no—! Oh, I didn't."

"I fear that you did. I dislike intensely the step forced upon me. But I have eighty-five student nurses in my charge. Whatever my personal feelings may be, I cannot sacrifice their welfare to yours. Your presence here, now that this has become known, is undermining the discipline of the nursing school. Some of the students are very resentful. It will be better for you and for all of us to end the investigation quietly. I must ask this of you, Miss Bryce. I must ask you to resign now—"

Chickie sat upright, the blood draining from her heart. She stared at Miss Simonds, aware that her lips shook. She waited for them to quiet. "You ask me to resign, Miss Simonds? You mean this? I'm to leave?"

"I see no other way, Miss Bryce. You are to leave."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

CHICKIE'S FIGHT

It was three years since that night in June when Chickie took her dog and pressed her face against his head, whispering: "Ho, I know it, dog—it's so!" And she knew herself alone in the world with the heaviest cross a world can fashion laid upon her shoulders.

Three years she had carried it. Now she was grown strong under the weight. And in this moment strong enough to throw it off—strong enough to dash it to the ground.

She sat very still, within her a leaping storm. She knew that she must fight—and she would. She waited for her words to come.

She temporized: "You think I must resign, Miss Simonds?"

"Is there any need to repeat it, Miss Bryce? I regret this deeply."

"It is a great deal to ask. It means so much to me—so much. Isn't there some way to avoid it? My record for these twenty months here is stainless. Shouldn't I be judged by that, and not by the past?"

"You force me into a difficult position. I must do what seems best for the whole. I have really no choice in the matter. You can surely understand that this revelation makes your further presence here practically impossible. You would be pointed out; you would be whispered about. You would hurt the reputation of every girl in the school."

Chickie drew in her breath with a rough gasp. "How could I do that?"

"Why do you insist on argument? You must realize that we have to keep our standards above reproach. Can we permit it to be said that the nursing profession offers refuge to girls of doubtful character?"

Chickie half whispered: "Doubtful? I? Oh, I am not doubtful—I never was. Should no refuge be offered? Oh, none? You know, Miss Simonds, I am as good as many girls.

My mind is not corrupt. I have striven hard. I have never stinted in all these months. I am glad to serve. . . ."

And she grew excited. Her words came in broken phrases, with short, hard breaths between. She had to stop now and then because of a twisting at her lips. And she had to press her hands because they were knocking against the table.

And she told how it was life to her. How her father counted on it, and every one, and she had a right to prove herself.

"So I can't resign, Miss Simonds! I'm not going to resign! I've come here to serve; to pour out my life, and I am going to do this, and no one has a right to deny me the chance. Not you, or any one!"

She stood up a little, leaning on her hands. Her eyes flamed, and a white, tragic line came about her mouth.

"Sit down, Miss Bryce! Control yourself. I would be glad to have you stay. I am sorry the charges have been brought. But there are girls here—many of them very young. I can't jeopardize their future in order to make yours."

She sank down, then asked, with a desperate calm: "How can I hurt them, Miss Simonds? How does it harm them if I am allowed to be of use in the world?" She wouldn't wait for answer.

"I don't see how the world can benefit by my defeat, or how other girls are aided if I am crushed. I don't see that at all!"

"You harm these girls because they may figure that you broke the laws and are honored. So they may do the same. And you harm them because those who know the deeds of your life may conclude that all nurses are likewise uncertain in their standards. Why should a girl of pure character be smirched by another's past?"

"What I did can't smirch any one else, Miss Simonds. And because people judge us evil doesn't make us so."

"But we can suffer because of the world's judgment, Miss Bryce. The young students would suffer if they, as a class, should be judged of unsound moral fiber. Neither you nor any other individual has a right to bring upon them such a censure."

Chickie grew suddenly scarlet and bewildered. She pressed her closed hands against her mouth.

Miss Simonds said, "So, let the matter end, Miss Bryce."

She answered, almost to herself: "What will Jonathan do? Oh, there is my father and mother—"

"Did you think of them three years ago, Miss Bryce?"

"I am thinking of them now. I can't undo what is past. But I can make the future. I thought I had a right to do this. Miss Simonds, I thought I had a right to come here and prove myself—as much right to come back as you or any one has to go on. Oh, only cowards give up. And it is flouting God and truth and everything to sink down forever in the shadow of a wrong.

"And you think it is right to force this on me? Oh, you can't think that! I don't see how you can refuse me the chance to do what good I can. All these twenty months—you mean to blot them out? You don't realize what you are doing!"

She looked up then and swallowed and held her lips in a hard, straight line: "You are just insisting that I be chained all my life to this one error! You're doing that!"

And Chickie wouldn't call it a sin and she wouldn't master the sore, childish pride that being humbled only reared the more.

Miss Simonds closed her eyes wearily: "If you won't understand, Miss Bryce, that it is your interest against the interest of many, what can I say to you? You speak as though I were responsible for your downfall."

"Ho! Downfall! You call it that! It was no more a downfall than marriage is and I looked at it as that sacred. And it was. All the sin is because it didn't turn out right and I was fooled. You call me a person of doubtful character. But I'm not. I never was. It doesn't make me of unsound morality because I loved. You don't know. You can't judge.

"My child had a perfect right to be. It had every right that God can know. Only man could find it wrong. Why they have to make laws to create a wrong where none exists. And that's so! And what difference is there between my child and the child of marriage? What difference between married emotions and unmarried emotions? Why don't you answer? I can tell you! Ho—a fig leaf!"

Suddenly she laughed—a half sobbing, hysterical laugh. Miss Simonds blanched. She rubbed her finger slowly across the envelope.

"This is where our views differ, Miss Bryce. You seem to think you had a perfect right to follow out your own selfish desires and give no thought to consequences. You did a thing that if done by all would shake the foundations of the entire

moral world. These conventions are for the protection of the home and the young race. If we disregard marriage what is to become of the children of the world? Are they to be fatherless because you or others will not wait for the law's sanction? Is it any justification that your love is sacred when it is at the same time utterly selfish?"

The shot went to the heart. Chickie was stunned and nodded as though she didn't quite know what she was doing. "Yes—that's true—the child shouldn't suffer. That's the wrong—"

But she was desperate and rallied even from this. She kept repeating: "That's the wrong." And there went flashing through her mind and every tortured nerve, images she had seen of these children; and things she had thought in all these aching years.

She poured them out now like a living fire. There was no stopping her. Miss Simonds put up her hand. Chickie flung her head back and kept on:

"But that's the world's sin, Miss Simonds, and not mine. The world should not treat a baby so. It should be glad to have them. It should protect them and recognize them—oh, as a great gift. Then there would be no shame. but a beauty in the coming of a child—no matter who the mother was, or the father!

"And some day this will be, and no law will dare to take a little child and brand it and make all its life a misery. Do you think that's right? You tell me, Miss Simonds—do you think that's right?"

Miss Simonds pushed her chair: "Will you sit down, Miss Bryce? You are acting very foolish."

"I say—do you think that's right? Was it right that I had to go away and hide and pray that my child would die and pray that I would die? As though to have a child were the ultimate infamy!

"But it should be a glory. And every girl who is to have a child should be honored—"

"I think you've said quite enough, Miss Bryce. You are not aiding yourself—"

"Ho—aiding myself—but I say there should be a temple builded—the most beautiful place in all the world; and girls who are to have children should go there, and the law should

do everything to make the child a worth-while child. Then men would acknowledge their children and be proud of them, and love would be recognized, as marriage is!

"Ho—I'd like to know what you think. Why don't you answer?"

Suddenly she heard this uncontrolled voice of hers shrilling. Suddenly she knew she was defeated, the half-won triumph snatched away. She saw Miss Simonds gather papers on the desk and she noticed that Miss Simonds' nails were pink and shiny, like little petals.

She heard a voice of cold dignity: "Are you finished at last, Miss Bryce? Or can you think of something else to say?"

Chickie kept her eyes down. And this second death of hope was a frightful, dooming thing.

"You are neither chastened nor humbled. I am sorry to see this attitude. I have a sympathy for you, Miss Bryce. But you wish the whole world declared wrong in order that you may be found right. You want to make your own rules and play your own game, yet you demand a share in the world's favors."

Chickie gave a sharp, forlorn denial. "Ho, I want a chance to keep the rules, to show that I will keep them." And she added with a broken quiet, "You won't give it to me, Miss Simonds? Surely—"

"Please, Miss Bryce! I have been patient. Now don't reopen the subject. It is closed. Make your arrangement when you can. I will do all in my power to make it easy for you—"

Chickie closed her eyes. She stood for a few moments resting her weight on her hands.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE LOST FIGHT

THE hardest thing Chickie ever did was to walk down that endless corridor with her head up and her lips quiet. She had forcibly to keep herself from running.

The last few paces she did run, with a flying bolt reached her room, closing the door as though all the wild things of earth pursued her.

She felt herself in the midst of a lightning and a clash—and she kept saying: "No! It can't be! It is not!"

But she stooped down suddenly and pulled her trunk from under the bed. She began flinging clothes helter-skelter into it.

In the ward she had left less than an hour ago was a little, homeless girl. And she had a broken back. Chickie had been drawing a picture to amuse her—a funny picture of a man with a great long nose. The little girl went into gales of laughter and said: "Aw, nurse—pretty nurse—don't go!" So Chickie was to rush right back and finish the mouth and put another twist on the nose. Sure now! No fooling?

Chickie remembered this now. Her heart swelled in a still passion of revolt. A mere human being, a thing of flesh like herself, had sent for her and had calmly ordered that all these glad, new threads of her life were to be snapped. It was stark and incredible as though one rejoicing mightily in each breath he draws is told: "Step in here—you are to be murdered!"

No one submits to a thing like that! Chickie wouldn't. They'd see! The frenzy of her hands became terrible. The drawers were empty. She put down the cover on the trunk.

And she began to dress—quickly—but pausing now and then and pressing her fists against her cheeks. She wore a dark suit, a new white gardenia pinned to the lapel. Chickie loved a flower, the song of a bird, a ray of light shimmering across the wall. Things like this were music.

She wore a dark hat with a brim. Under this her eyes were cavernous, her face had a moonlike pallor. Looking at her,

no one would ever dream they were sending her away because she was a girl of doubtful character.

The words rang in her ears. She stood at the foot of the bed, touching the white flower. She couldn't wear a flower! Not humble; not chaste in her. She started to unpin it; hastily snapped it back. Was it true that she could be utterly punished, that other girls might learn?

Miss Simonds said so. It had brought out that hysterical tumult. Frantic, uncontrolled sentences flashed back into Chickie's mind—brought hot stains to her cheeks. How unbridled she had been! How pathetically defiant.

She wondered now if she might have fared better; might even have remained if she had steadied herself; if she had spoken with a pleading dignity. Oh, no—that wouldn't have mattered! Why, she had been quiet at first. Oh! who could be quiet in such an hour—quiet when lives are broken and a game fight lost?

Lost—she saw this word in a picture—that old picture of many waters rising, men drowning, but, above it all, a girl clinging to the cross. One saved and hundreds lost!

Still she remained at the foot of the bed, staring about the room. Myrtle's flimsy underwear was drying on the chairs. Powder and hairpins strewed the dresser; all the drawers were opened. How all this shoddiness had irritated her in the beginning. And how she had railed at Myrtle when she piled careless little mounds of cigarette ashes in the window box.

How she clung to these details now—how she even loved them. She was frozen in a resentful hesitation, unable to leave. Oh, something would happen! So one looks at the face of a mother who is dead and waits for the beloved lips to speak again.

Twenty months in this room—quitting it now—never come rollicking up the steps carrying a great cake from Jennie—two or three, Phyllis and Myrtle, racing along with her—never light-hearted friendships like these again.

Her thoughts crowded. They took the breath from her—made her faint. Finally she took up her purse.

And she went back and wiped off the top of her table with an old towel. As she did this a sudden question dashed against her like a blow. Did she have to go? Had Miss Simonds the right, the exclusive right, to send her away?

Her muscles tightened; the blood went pounding to her head. There might be some one else—

She went deliberately to the mirror, took a clean handkerchief and wiped her face. Then she drank a glass of water. With the quiet of a machine she went down the steps, back along that corridor. And she was standing in the office again.

It was half an hour before she was admitted.

Miss Simonds appeared worried. Seeing Chickie in street clothes, she said astonished: "It's not necessary that you leave to-day, Miss Bryce. You may stay till it is convenient to go."

Chickie leveled her eyes to a picture on the opposite wall. She smiled with a soft irony: "It is as convenient now as it can ever be. I would like to ask, Miss Simonds—have you the power—the sole power in this case? Have you the right to take my life in your hands as you are doing? I mean is it according to the rule of the hospital?"

Miss Simonds' face reddened:

"If you wish to take the matter before the student body, that is your privilege, as you know. But I must warn you that you will only add to the pain of the experience. Further, you may have charges brought against you, if you wish. But you have admitted everything. The procedure is simply inevitable. In taking this step, I am merely answering a trust put upon me. Your further presence is hurtful to the school. Whether I tell you this, or your fellow students or the officers of the institution pass judgment is of secondary importance. I can assure you, in any case, it will be the same."

"Was I of value before this became known?"

"You can answer that yourself."

"And if these charges were not brought to you, I would still be of value?"

"What is the purpose of your question?"

"I want to know if I may transfer to another hospital and finish—"

Miss Simonds passed her large, capable hand across her forehead: "On your transfer I should be bound to state the reason for your leaving."

Chickie swayed: "Might not some other reason be given?"

"Can you ask me, Miss Bryce, to enter into an agreement to deceive and misrepresent? I consider it very wrong that you yourself did this in entering here."

"Oh, Miss Simonds—what else could I do? Why should

it be considered truthful and noble to fasten this thing on me? Why is it righteous to prevent me from serving the right?"

"We have gone into all of this. There is no value in argument since you can not be convinced of your wrong doing. . . ."

"Oh, yes—I am well convinced of that! But I am not convinced of any one's power to insist that, once down, I remain down!"

She suddenly flung back her head—suddenly made a little rush to the door.

She had an idea that she staggered and kept looking at her feet, holding her arms rigid to her side. She passed nurses and nodded, but didn't know to whom. She had reached the end of a world and wanted to plunge herself wildly—anywhere—

She went like this for three blocks along Twenty-second Street, then she turned around with a fright leaping in her throat. Had any one seen her? They would think her mad.

It was a golden morning in late summer—the street bland as a song. She reached Mission and went wandering along, stopping to look in windows. She saw a bolt of blue ribbon—soft, faded blue like Jennie's eyes. She hurried from that window—oh, what would they say—how would they take it?

And Jonathan so proud of her. Jonathan saying: "What do you think of my girl—will she make a good nurse?"

Jonathan was not to know! Never! This secret she could keep. She passed the 5 and 10 cent store—entered. She stopped before a counter. Glass beads of all colors were in little glasses. Was Mary's little girl old enough to play with them? She bought big ones and a ball of pink string to run them on.

She went around buying all manner of nicknacks—three big, blue egg cups—nice for breakfast. Jennie would like them.

It occurred to her to bring gifts to them. Jennie loved lavender—two bungalow aprons of lavender with the pockets and all piped in black, with bunches of roses here and there—

And a silk shirt for Jonathan. Wouldn't he be the lor though! She bought a white one, very heavy. She paid $- for it. Putting it under her arm, she came near to crying.

She walked blocks beyond Fair Oaks. Then she took out her vanity case, put on rouge—made her lips as bright as cherries.

And she came in to them laughing—and tossed the packages upon them. They were sitting at lunch. She said: "Ho—well, here she is! Ain't this grand though?"

Then there was, "Why?" "What! and how can you be here?"

"By reason of two feet and ten toes, ole dears—my vacation—"

She threw her arms around Jonathan—and pressed her head against his rugged heart and all her life seemed trembling from her. But she said: "A surprise, Johnny darling—don't you love to be surprised? Set my place—all pretty now—"

She ran into her room—gay, sunny room—closed the door—braced her back and all her strength against it.

CHAPTER XL

THE GIFT

She heard Wildie sniffing under the door, and she opened it a little. He walked cautiously around her, licking her hands where the fingers curled. Then he looked up with his proud, trustful eyes and rubbed his head along her arm.

And he saw that this was no jaunty time—no merry lark that brought her home. Bluff Jennie and Jonathan all right, but not the dog. He licked her face and guessed. She knew it by the quiet way he let his head rest against her knee.

Jonathan was chuckling now because Jennie went pattering about their room, trying on the new dress, brushing her hair up smart to make a sweet appearance. Chickie, in the midst of these trifling, homey things, with the old endearments touching her through every sense, felt a white, grim fire aflame within her mind.

All this was hers—and she was theirs. She had a right to them and honor and everything! Who were they to take it from her?

She went over to the window and pressed her forehead against the glass. And she couldn't believe that her hope was gone. Nor this a final thing.

Twenty months of effort blotted out; twenty months of striving mocked? She wouldn't meet it so.

She kept saying to herself: "There'll be a way—I'll think of something—"

Luckily the house was all at ends for they were papering the halls and the little parlor. All the furniture was stacked in the dining room. It made a stirring, bright hubbub and kept Jennie running from one end of the place to another.

She said to Chickie: "Can you stand all this, Chickie, dear? Will you stay home the whole two weeks?"

"Why not? Ain't home grand? And I'll sun myself in Jennie's garden and fill myself with Jennie's tarts—so sweet, ole dear!"

She pulled open the drawers of the cupboard, ferreting for

an old pair of gloves. She drew them on with a flourish and began to help with the polishing of the furniture.

Jennie blushed to be so flattered; blushed that Chickie loved the little cottage so. Why, she might well be flaunting off to the springs or Yosemite, and here she was, rushing about with a dustrag. And her very first day off at that!

Jennie said: "Well, we'll soon finish. Then your father will take us driving. We'll visit the museum. That's so interesting."

Chickie kept her head turned. "Oh, my, yes! What with mummies and marbles—"

She was thinking: "Myrtle is getting off now. She'll see my trunk and the things gone from the dresser." Chickie's heart thumped against the old walnut sideboard.

Myrtle would begin to wonder. Soon they would all be talking. They would be stopping each other with shocked whispers: "What do you make of it? Is it true? Of all things!"

And Irene would be the center of excited groups. Was this what she had to tell at the election? Oh—her aunt knew it all.

Chickie blamed Irene. She was the one who had unearthed it. Chickie had gone all her life to school out here. People that she had forgotten remembered her. And it was only two years and four months since that April morning when Helena Bryce had her name in the paper with a long, ambiguous statement about her baby's death, so that it might even appear she had killed the child—

This was what they were saying to each other about her now. And she had walked out without a good-by; without a word of defense. She had been forced to this. She could never go back—the future was blocked.

Chickie's hands flew. The old walnut sideboard grew shiny as a mirror. Never be a nurse now—

But she kept seeing the hospital, the long corridors; the airy, sun-filled wards; and the children, patient, even happy in their pain. Little Emma laughing because that picture—hee—so funny! And Johnny Ross begging: "Aw, gee, nurse, can't I have a drink? Gimme a sip—gwan!"

This life was hers!

That night Chickie lay with her hands covering her eyes. She thought of her bed in the room with Myrtle. She

imagined herself stealing back—softly—oh, and wake up there to-morrow morning, pin the white cap to her hair; find all this of to-day but a dream; all this of to-day wiped out.

Suddenly she sat bolt upright. There was to be an operation in the morning. Doctor David was the surgeon. He would notice her gone. Would he ask why? Would he hear this thing?

Of course he'd hear! Why should her secret be kept? And it wouldn't. She knew that well enough. In a week it would filter through all the wards—oh, you hear everything.

Chickie saw his face, pale yet strong, and with such a winning charm about it. She thought he had the noblest look sometimes, yet a youngness and a verve. And he made fun of her, calling her "Nurse Helena" because she couldn't leave off the "doctor" before the David.

How would he look hearing this of her? What would he think of the way she had lied and pretended? And the way she had talked of babies who were abandoned and selfish people who left them. It would sicken him.

She lay back and turned her face against the pillows. In her thought she had flashed out boldly against every one else's scorn. Now she was stilled, thinking of him who seemed so glorious to her.

They were going to a concert together on Friday night. Well—there would be no concert.

All the next morning Chickie's mind went through the hundred details of the operation. Miss Pain, the chief surgical nurse, a fair girl with magnificent blue eyes, would ask: "Where is Bryce?" Irene would give some answer. Then Irene would begin to scrub. She would have a bright hot look in her face. Miss Pain, whom Chickie half adored because she was so wondrously capable, yet as gracious as a practitioner, would begin to wonder.

Chickie was carried so completely into this scene that for two or three minutes she stood with a plate in her hand, the dish towel quiet.

Jennie said: "Chickie, dear, you just go out in the garden—never mind about these dishes."

So Chickie laughed and flipped the towel with a terrible speed. Afterwards she aired all the beds. She went into the front room to see how the painters were getting along.

And she thought: "I should send for the trunks." But her

thought balked. No! Her trunks had a right to be there—and she had a right to be there. She loved sitting in the dining room, with all the happy chatter. Did they all blame her? Did any one put in a word for her? Phyllis would? Would Myrtle?

That afternoon she walked halfway down to the hospital, not knowing why. She walked back in a breathless panic—

No use! Those gates were closed. She couldn't force them to reopen. Resentment burned like a poison in her heart. She wanted to talk—shout out this thing—

Yet when the phone rang for her, she refused to answer.

And three days passed. Thursday afternoon a registered package came. It was from Jake. Within was a bracelet—a broad, platinum band, massed with diamonds and sapphires. It was the most exquisite thing Chickie had ever seen. Oh—a gift like this for her. Tears sprang into her eyes. There was a note:

"Mr. Munson presents his compliments to Miss Helena Bryce and begs she will accept the enclosed in memory of moons and sich, and that she will accept it yay or nay. Firstly, if it be yay, then in honor of great winds on mountain tops. Secondly—though God save the man's soul if it be nay—yet that she accept it none the less in token of much beauty and the sweetness of great hours shared."

She was touched to the inmost heart by that note, even more than she was astonished at the priceless gift. For the note had the mellowness, and the rich, fine tolerance that was Jake's.

Much he cared if they called her "doubtful." Ho—if she wrote one single word he would come speeding. He would laugh at these puny judgments. "To the devil with them, Helena. Let them kick us out on our face. I tell you there are better gardens to tread!"

Something like that Jake would say. He would put his arms around her; snap his fingers at the world—

Chickie put the bracelet on her wrist. She sat down, feeling suddenly weak and defeated. Well—she had tried anyway—tried hard to come back alone—

And how gentle it was—and how sweet to know another cared. Another—high up in the world's good grace would yet so gladly stoop to her—

CHAPTER XLI

THE VISITOR

THAT night Chickie wrote to Jake. She would keep the gift because of the way it was offered. She would prize it above measure. There were long, bright pages. When it was finished she dashed a bit of sachet on the paper, for this was a schoolgirl trick of hers. And she signed her name with an airy flourish.

But she made no mention of her dismissal—no hint that she was beaten.

She sat at her pretty wicker desk moving a dry pen back and forth over the page. Her heart was blazing.

For there had been, like a star in her mind, the dream of great achievement; vision of a new and glorious Chickie climbing up to some great height; pale, beautiful person, with a light about her like she had seen in the faces of those who serve.

She wanted this; had followed the hope of it. In the hospital it became each day more nearly hers.

Now it was gone. The world wanted her to fall—had the power to shut her out. She considered this with a hard, metallic quiet. They could say she was a menace and ask her to leave. If the world could do this, what was to become of her? Hate spread like a wound in her mind.

Yet she wouldn't admit to Jake that she was conquered. To write this would mean surrender, complete and final, of her fight. She wasn't ready for this—not yet—

Withal, she had never wished more piercingly for some one to stand beside her; some one to say that faith was high—oh, come now—

She thought of Mary. Ask her. Mary might think of a way.

She went down to Mary's on Friday morning. Mary thought it was just her day off. This made it hard to speak. Now if Mary had said: "How come! What are you doing home? This isn't your free time, is it?" Chickie would have answered:

"Ho—you bet it's free! Time's my own again. Kicked out—that's a fact . . ."

But Mary's eyes were dancing with excitement. She grabbed Chickie effusively: "You heard! Oh—you didn't? About Lucy—well—sit tight then. If it isn't delirious! After all these years of grubbing, in walks George Adams last night with $10,000 in his pockets. Poor Lucy! She's almost out of her mind. It's from those old lots they owned over in Richmond. You remember when Lucy took us over on a picnic about a hundred years ago, and we got all sunburned and all came home with a grouch? And George bought the lots and paid about two bits for them?

"Well—the railroad needs them. And they bounce down the $10,000—no eyes winked about it one way or the other—"

This was drama exultant and quivering marching straight into their homely kitchens. They raved about it—Mary was in a fever. So Chickie didn't speak.

But after lunch when the first extraordinary delight was a little tempered, Chickie's own problem came uppermost. She went over ways of broaching the subject and mentally decided to say calmly: "Mary, I've been asked to resign. I've left the hospital. I have no idea what on earth to do now—"

What she heard herself saying was this: "Mary—what do you suppose would happen if they should find out about me?"

"For pity sakes—why should they find out about it now? Didn't you say few of the girls are from San Francisco? It would be the purest accident if they should stumble on it."

Just then little Edward came in from the back yard. He was now five, full of roguery, and at the knowing stage where he seized on each new word, rolled it over under his tongue, and lay in his crib at night trying it out. He said to Chickie once when she appeared without a hat and with her hair blown: "Say—you look reckless!" And he teased Mary by calling her in very precise, prolonged sounds: "Oh—mother, dear!"

The hopskotch Mary had chalked in the yard was blurred. He wanted it made over. Then Mary must teach him again how to play. When they got to the mailbox between the fifth and sixth space, there was a heated argument. Couldn't she tell him how to do it? You did not straddle the box—that wasn't the way! And it wasn't a mailbox, anyhow. It was the devil's ears belonged there in the center. Well, he guessed he knew.

Mary said: "It is the way! That's the way we always played. You ask Chickie."

Edward wrinkled his nose, with a lofty: "Maybe that was the way in old times! 'Tain't the way now!" He puzzled and practiced and finally jumped with both feet together. And that was the new, good way.

Mary became absorbed, wondering about the child. Should she give his individuality full play? Should she let him contradict and argue with her? When should she curb and when should she humor?

She reverted from this to the consideration of Lucy's luminous good fortune, forgetting Chickie's problem until Chickie's desire to speak was gone. Then Mary said: "What was that we were talking about?"

"I forget. Nothing important, I suppose."

Why make Mary sad? Settle it herself.

Mary walked home with her. There would be a conclave of all the Blakes, little and big, in Martha's kitchen. They would have lunch and wind into all the details of Lucy's dazzling, incredible joy.

As Mary walked along pushing the go-cart and little Edward insisted on helping, Chickie thought, "How little we know of each other—even Mary and I!"

She was one world and Mary was another. And Mary looked commonplace enough to-day with the plaid skirt and the brown jersey coat and a dinky white sport hat, yet there seemed an inner richness; a great, full sweetness in Mary's heart—even a young majesty coming to dwell now in Mary's eyes. The little girl looked up at her, smiling. Mary said, "You darling, blessed little thing!"

Chickie shivered. She felt very alone, with a wish suddenly to cling to another. She said to Mary, "Let me take her this afternoon. Then you can be free—"

Janice was the child's name for its mother believed in fanciness. Janice was two and as pretty as the dream Mary weaved for her.

It affected Jennie in a peculiar manner—these visits of the little golden-haired girl. She sometimes looked at the two bright, shiny heads—Chickie's with its deep, soft waves and the baby's, a fluff of curls. Once she went over and turned the two faces upward. And suddenly great tears ran down her cheeks.

It affected Wildie also. He was jealous and walked round

and round, sniffing contemptuously. Chickie said: "Nice how-do-you-do, Dog! Jealous of a baby!" So he settled at Chickie's feet, but looking up now and then to remind her of his presence.

They sat in the room of sun and peace—shut off from the confusion of painters and furniture stacked anyways.

Chickie had the little girl half tucked under her arm. She strung the colored beads. Janice caught at the brilliant reds, doubling up with laughter when she found them in her hands.

Friday—to-night there would have been a concert. She could not keep her thoughts from this. If he didn't know yet—by to-morrow he surely would—

Then there was a knock at the door. She heard her mother's step and imagined Jennie growing whimsical, called out: "Why so formal, Mrs. Bryce? You may enter—"

Jennie opened the door, her face pink as a rose. Behind her was another—a tall figure, with a sallow face, strongly cut and now very intent—almost eager. It was Dr. David!

Chickie sat motionless, the little girl in her arms. His eyes sought hers. They were warm. She met them a moment—then a wave of scarlet rushed up, even from her heart, and stained her cheeks.

And he looked at her lowered head and at the child laughing in her face.

He came forward easily, making some excuse: "I wanted to find out about to-night—well—"

Then Jennie came over and took Janice and went tiptoeing out as though this were a conference of state. The little girl protested. She wanted the beads. She insisted on coming back for them.

Wildie got up and stretched—settled again.

Chickie wished to speak. But she kept patting the dog's head.

David said: "I only learned to-day that you had left for good, Helena."

She answered: "Oh—"

He said simply: "But, of course, you can't do this. Not at all!"

"Oh, yes—but I can—"

She wondered with a mounting fear: "Doesn't he know! Why does he say such a thing—"

He shook his head and came over to her chair: "No—not at all!"

CHAPTER XLII

THE PROMISE

She could see his hands, for he stood very near to her chair. She thought with a heat and a thickness pressing about her: "I can't look at him! Oh—isn't this awful—"

In her mind was an image of his face, winning and vital with the eyes that drew her because they were gray and touched with humor but mostly because she fancied within them that great light of the spirit.

Once before she had looked into eyes and imagined all things noble; all that was pure and beautiful dwelt behind them.

Now this man she had exalted, whose esteem she had so fervently cherished, was seeing her anew; seeing her with all the pretense gone.

She was shamed to the heart. For it is ruthless that others see only the deed one has done and not at all the motive; nor the days and thoughts and even glories that may lie behind the barren fact.

If he could see that, and perhaps understand? Who ever does—who ever does—

She held her hands very still, whispering to her mind: "It has come. Be quiet—"

He was speaking: "You love the work, so you cannot give it up."

She raised her head, forcing her eyes to look in his: "You must know, Dr. David—it is already done. I have left."

He was bending down a little, a warmth in his face that reached and held her as though he took her hand. "Whether you have left or not doesn't matter. If you can't stay where you are, there are other hospitals in the city—"

"Yes, I thought of that."

"Why not transfer, then?"

Her voice sank till she could scarcely bring it forth. "I spoke of this to Miss Simonds. I don't believe I can transfer."

"Yes, you can. You have your credits."

"No, I haven't them."

"They will be given to you. There will be no question of that. Student nurses have frequently transferred."

She smiled then and turned her head quickly, biting her lips. She said in a very low tone, "This is different—I mean my case is different. Other hospitals might not admit me."

He must know that. Why did he keep standing there? Why did he keep looking at her? She wanted to stand up, to say quietly, "So it is ended—that is all. I am grateful." But he seemed to keep her there as though he placed his hand on her shoulder.

"Some hospitals, of course, rarely accept transfers, but others are eager to add to their staffs. I know of several where you can most probably enter. That's what I came to tell you. I'll speak to Mrs. Ellis about you. She's the head nurse at the hospital where I do most of my own work—a fine person. Shall I tell her you'll be out to see her?"

"Oh, no; don't do that! Why—well—you see, it won't do any good."

"What do you mean—it won't do any good? Is my word that worthless?"

She thought again with a deadly faintness: "Doesn't he know? I'll have to say it," and she began, "Well, Miss Simonds said—"

She opened her hands and studied their palms. He watched her, and wondered at the delicacy of her face, its whiteness, its purity, as men had wondered before. "What did Miss Simonds say to you?"

"A great deal. She said a great deal. Don't bother about me, Doctor David—"

"You mean that Miss Simonds discouraged the idea of transfer? Well, usually one would. I don't agree with her in this. See here, Nurse Helena—didn't you tell me when you were hardly started that you must succeed—that it meant more to you than to any other girl in the school?"

She was standing now, her face half averted. She put up her hand, pretending to push the hair from her forehead. "Yes."

"Well—you have succeeded. And you must finish. I have an idea I may need you. I also have an idea that my recommendation will have considerable weight with Mrs. Ellis. So you go down and get your credits to-morrow. I'll tell Mrs. Ellis you'll be out to see her Monday afternoon. Will you do that?"

She kept her eyes half closed, feeling that all her strength must stand her now.

Then she felt his hand taking hers. It was strong and vital and touched her like some glowing current. She could easily have wept—easily have begged him: "Go—oh, won't you please go?—this is more than I can bear—"

But he said insistently: "To-morrow morning you go and get them. Now, am I to call for you here, to-night?"

She was shocked and answered with a breath of pain: "Oh—you didn't wish me still to go?"

There came a questing sadness to his eyes: "Why not? Yes—yes, I expect you still to go—"

"You will excuse me—please—"

"Shall we go for a ride instead?"

"Not to-night. I'd much rather not—"

He kept hold of her hand: "Well—all right then. But I'm going to call you up at noon to-morrow. You'll be home by that time."

She had not promised to go. She did not wish to go. She wondered if he knew completely what he asked.

She felt intently his glance and knew that he expected her to meet it. She did, though it was hard to do this. She said, with her lips grown utterly pale: "It is kind in you to come—to bother so much. It is very fine in you—"

For a moment they looked at each other—the clasp of his hand tightened, then he said with a boyish, half-teasing laugh: "Yes—very fine. I am that! Be here when I phone, won't you? I want to know how you come out—"

A wave of color swept up from her throat even to her temples and suddenly her eyes filled. She said softly: "Yes—"

The picture of her, standing so, fastened in his mind. It heightened the note of sadness that now tinged all his images of her.

There were many of these. Nearly two years he had been gathering them. The night of the dance when he looked at her glowing face, her young lips parted in fervor and she said how much it meant that she should win in this new work—how very much—

Often in the months that followed he had surprised a rapt fervor in her dark eyes. That time, for instance, when he fashioned anew the girl Susie's mouth; and again when he labored so to keep the hand on that game little kid.

He had wondered at her loyalty, the brightness of her

service—and he had puzzled long at the astonishing reserve of this girl who was at once so young and so full of charm.

He had liked musing of her. He had grown to want the tribute of admiration in her swift glance. Once when he took her for a ride she said: "That was glorious of you. I love a thing like that!" This had surprised and warmed him so that he laughed and seized her hands . . .

But she drew them quietly free—she was at once silent. This quiet of hers; this persistent shunning of pleasures and of the slightest intimacy baffled him. What young, fanatical ideals governed her, subdued her so—kept her remote?

But he never dreamed of such a cause as this. And coming down the steps of the little cottage with Jennie very ceremoniously bowing him out, it affected him as tragic.

He saw Chickie as she sat with Mary's pretty child in her lap; the sun glinting over their hair, and the flowers all about; saw her glance upward, and a deathless pain cross swiftly her pale, uplifted face.

He had wished to fight then; wished to fling an arm about her . . . so defenseless she seemed. What a shame, hauling up a thing like this.

Now he wondered—a girl of her type, with her face and her manner—how had she come to such a pass?

And who was the man figuring so cruelly in her life? Where was he now? Why had he deserted her?

He brooded these things and grew angry. After brooding still further, he became sad, knowing readily enough how things may be, and seeing not the shame in them but the pathos.

She loved this other greatly, of course, and gave to her love completely as she now gave to her work—an ardent nature. . . .

Why had it turned out so ill? Why, in the end, was she forsaken? She must have hoped in those months of waiting. And suffered— He ground his teeth. . . . But why had she blundered so? Why had it all become known. . . .

Then he wondered about that gentle old woman and about the "Jonathan" she spoke of so vividly. Had they stood her well? He hoped so. Surely some one should. Pity for her and for the great fight still before her filled him.

How game she was! Ah, damn it—why need things be made so hard? Would she go there to-morrow?

He became uneasy lest she should fail. . . . Then he remembered that she promised. He thought: "She will!"

CHAPTER XLIII

THE RECOMMENDATION

SATURDAY morning Chickie walked down Twenty-second Street. Her steps lagged. She stopped to admire the roses in a garden; stopped again and watched three young girls playing jacks. She was appalled at the task before her.

What would Miss Simonds say now? Would she give her the credits? And in the transfer would she tell it all again and say for this Chickie had to leave?

Did Dr. David know they would do this? How much had he heard and how much believed? Oh—this was bitter enough! Nothing was worth it—nothing!

She walked more quickly, feeling his gray eyes upon her. Hurry! She said she would. She had to!

Nearing the hospital she was almost in a faint. Some of the visiting doctors were leaving—some were coming. They were like people in a breathless and fateful drama. She brushed past, smiling.

The girls at the switchboard looked up with quick, interested glances. They were eager to speak. Chickie smiled and turned in a panic.

The assistant was in the office, and for many minutes—each one a separate agony for Chickie—she did not turn her head. Then, continuing to write, she said formally, "What can I do for you, Miss Bryce?"

"I would like to see Miss Simonds. . . ."

"Miss Simonds will return in a short while, I believe."

Chickie sat down, yet half wondering if she would be asked to stand. She watched the door and, hearing a hand on the knob, a chill ran through every nerve. Perhaps it was one of the girls in her class— Would she be friendly? Would she pretend not to see Chickie sitting there? What of it now? What difference could it make?

It was Miss Pain, the girl with the magnificent blue eyes, whom Chickie so greatly admired, and under whom she had lately been working in surgery.

She stopped short for the shadow of a moment, then came

over quickly, a flash about her: "I hear you're to leave us, Miss Bryce. I'm sorry. I'll miss you. But you'll do well where you're going."

Chickie managed to smile. Her voice became husky and almost inaudible. "Why—why, Miss Pain, I'm not sure at all where I am going. I may not even be accepted—"

"Why, certainly you'll be accepted. Your work is excellent. I wish you'd let me hear from you when you're settled. This business of transferring is a nuisance." She offered Chickie her hand with a warm, "I think you're making a wise change; good luck to you!"

The meeting unnerved her. Did Miss Pain suppose she was leaving of her own accord? What rumors were flying here and there about her? Oh, surely the secret never was kept! She worked on her gloves, drawing her hands again and again over the fingers.

Some one else entered. Chickie kept her eyes down.

But it was Miss Simonds this time and she came right up and said in the briskest, most cheerful tone: "Good morning, Miss Bryce—come right over—"

It was a little more than Chickie could stand. She sank her teeth cruelly in her lips and stooped down as though to pick a pin from the floor. Then she got up and followed Miss Simonds to her desk.

"I understand you want to transfer, Miss Bryce. Dr. Ramm mentioned it."

Chickie answered dully: "Well—I wish to go on with the work. I don't want to give it up now—"

She wondered with an aching twist in her heart if he had listened to much talk about her and if all those feverish, unreckoned things she had poured out so burningly upon Miss Simonds had been repeated to him. "Am I entitled to my credits, Miss Simonds?"

"Yes—I have them ready. I have your reports and I've written you a letter of recommendation—"

The blood sprang to Chickie's face: "Oh—have you!"

"Your work while here and your conduct warrant it—"

Chickie was fast losing self-control. She pressed her hands on the desk and without looking across murmured: "I appreciate it, Miss Simonds—"

"Well, I trust that now you realize, Miss Bryce, that I am not at all personal in my stand—that you can well understand

how impossible, even for your own sake, it would be to remain here. No one wishes to be pointed out. You would be—"

Chickie had little heart to talk though she was almost giddy with relief—a letter of recommendation—then no word was said about the past and no opposition could be raised to her entrance in another hospital! This was enough. She only answered: "Well—I loved it here, Miss Simonds, and I have friends. I didn't wish to leave—I don't want to leave now—"

"It is for the best. You will soon acknowledge this yourself. Will you send for your trunk? I hope you will do well in the future."

Chickie got up. The room and all the walls tossed upon her a multitude of echoes—voices and gestures from days that had been richest and deepest of any she had known. She loitered an instant, as though she would have sweetened and purified the memory of herself that she was leaving here. She gathered up her credits with a hasty, "Thank you for these, Miss Simonds."

She left, and going out looked straight before her, holding her head up, keeping it up, rigid and high, her heart swelling until it seemed to burst. She was aware of passing people, two girls at the entrance; aware of smiling, and thinking, "Who are they?"

As she went down the steps she was conscious in a dazed way of their astonished glances. She defended herself coolly, "I don't know them. Why are they staring?"

She opened her bag and put the letters and credits within. Read them! See what they said! Wait a moment—

She went on as one rushing through a blaze. At the end of three or four blocks, she paused for a breath. She said to herself, smiling: "Why should I run—well—"

The ordeal was over. Easier than she had imagined. Why had Miss Simonds changed? Were her ideas different now?

There was a vacant lot here with a low fence, half torn down. Chickie stood here a moment, a reaction of quiet settling in her thoughts. She took out the reports. All high—all pleasant as though Helena Bryce were the finest student nurse in all the world.

She began to read the letter, and felt a touch of thanks for its warmth. Her work was good; her manner attractive, her dress neat—her conduct during twenty months above reproach—

These statements were strongly and clearly made.

Suddenly Chickie's eye paused; suddenly her heart was knocking. She saw two words: "I regret—" and knew what followed.

It was all there—unmarried—a mother—an inquest—

For a long while she stood motionless, unable to read further. Then she wiped her face, feeling gray and weak.

This was the paragraph: "I regret exceedingly the necessity of stating the reasons why Miss Bryce is leaving us. I regret this the more because of her very excellent record here. The facts are there. Fellow students brought charges to my notice. These charges, which Miss Bryce admits to be true, are, briefly, that in January two years ago Miss Bryce, then and since unmarried, became the mother of a child, which died as the mother was secretly taking it from the ranch house where it was born. A subsequent inquest, however, exonerated Miss Bryce of any blame and laid the infant's death to natural causes.

"The revelation of these facts, which Miss Bryce concealed at the time of her entrance here, makes the continuance of her training in this institution difficult. I see, however, no reason why these facts should prevent her from concluding, under more favorable conditions, work which she has performed with a most commendable spirit—"

And this she was to offer to that friend of David Ramm's. And, offering this, she was to ask that they accept her! That they make her a member of their school!

She folded the papers quietly—she let them remain in her clasped hands. She was unaware of the moments passing.

Some one said: "Are you ill? Shall I help you?" It was a stout, red-faced woman with an overly small, black hat—

Chickie said: "Why, no—I was just looking around." She steadied herself. She very deliberately straightened her hat. She walked on resolutely.

Nearly 12 now. He was to phone. Find out how she fared. She felt suddenly a cold fury against him. Did he know of this paragraph? Did he send her down there to get that?

And now did he suppose she would carry a thing like this to that Mrs. Ellis? Why she would as readily strip her soul and stand with it uncovered for any one to see! She was finished! She took the letter suddenly and tore it in two.

CHAPTER XLIV

JANINA'S WAY

CHICKIE didn't go home. She took the two parts of the letter and crumpled them in her purse.

She walked out Dolores Street, swiftly in a chill tensity of resolution. She walked thus, because she had no destination; she would never have any and she didn't care.

She came to the top of the hill—then to the railroad crossing, and suddenly remembered standing here once before. It was that day Jennie put the sweet lavender in the bureau drawers where the bridal set was hidden and where the letter from Barry Dunne lay open—the letter saying they had a right to love; think of it as a magnificent wave; never let the thoughts of others bring it shame.

She stood now at the same low fence and gazed fixedly at the bald Potrero hills, so brown against the lazy summer sky. With a piercing freshness she remembered the terror of that day and how she had longed for his arms—his voice.

She thought then that she knew loneliness! She knew it now—for one is only alone when hope leaves him.

It was so clear and gentle this noontime that she could see the waters of the Mission Bay—green and peaceful. She stared at them a long while, unwilling to move, fighting against thought.

A whistle with a deep, rugged voice swept up and broke the silence. Half-past twelve. Dr. David had phoned by now. She wasn't there. A hard satisfaction steeled through her mind.

And she could see his face, the lift of his head, the warmth of his deep eyes. The nobler he appeared to her thought, the more he was removed from her and the harder burned her resentment.

How could he be so blind about it? How could he have failed to understand? He said confidently: "Why, of course, you'll be accepted." And he was to phone and learn how she fared.

He would never know! She would not tell him his kindness was useless and she herself past aiding—yes, past aiding. Chickie said this aloud. A flame crept up along her neck, but her heart got heavy like a stone.

The bag with the letter of recommendation was a weight. She had a wish to raise it aloft; send it flinging across the lot. And standing there face to face with the tranquil hills her eyes grew hard and brilliant.

Get away from this—dismiss it—put it from her thoughts.

It was Saturday and not yet one o'clock. She thought of Janina and hurried. She would spend the afternoon with Janina—go shopping with her—walk into all the stores. Why not?

Janina, always ready to break an old date for a more promising new one, called gayly over the phone: "Sure, ole thing! Get yourself down as quick as you can."

Janina was in a biting mood. She looked very striking. Her bold eyes glittered. And as they sat in a booth of a new restaurant Janina had discovered in Sutter Street, she surveyed Chickie from head to foot. "Why so pale, little one?"

"Lack of rouge."

"All right! Why so excited, then?"

"I suppose you think I came here with some gorgeous adventure to regale. Sorry to dash your hopes—" Chickie picked up a menu. "Sweet in you, Janina, dear, to break a date for me."

"You can always count on me for that. Vows and promises make us slaves to the moods of yesterday. That's one reason why I disapprove of marriage. Who can know that in two years, five months and seven days from the present she shall still love John Doe, still yearn for his bald head opposite her at the table?

"Well—I phoned yesterday and Thursday. Your charming friend Myrtle stated: 'Bryce is not here and I'm not sure when she'll be in.' How come, my dear? And whither goest thou every night in the week?"

Chickie said abruptly: "I've left, Janina." The moment the words were out she felt smothered, almost unable to breathe.

Janina put down her napkin—her mouth straightened and tense: "Why?"

"They found out about me."

"Hell's bells!" She pushed her plate. "Do you mean to say, Chickie, that you turned yellow and walked out?"

"No—I was asked to leave. I had no choice." And she told Janina. And she took out the letter of recommendation and showed it.

Janina smoothed the crumpled sheet. Her eyes smoldered as though fires ate them. She said softly: "You can paste it together."

"I don't know what you mean—"

Janina bit through her teeth: "I said you can paste it together—paste—don't you understand—glue!"

"I won't need it! Did you read that paragraph?"

"I read it! What about it? It's true, isn't it?"

Chickie shut her eyes: "Yes—true. And it means that no place will admit me."

Janina folded her hands over the letter and looked quietly into Chickie's face. "Do you really suppose, Chickie, that you committed a new sin? Something that was never heard of in the nursing profession before?"

"I'm not telling you anything, Janina, except that no school knowing this would admit me."

"Why do they regard it such a crime to love or to have a child? How are you tainted because of this?"

Unconsciously Chickie repeated a sentence Miss Simonds had said: "No one has a right to do a thing that if done by all would shake the foundations of the whole moral law!"

"Bunk! That's just what we're aiming at! Shake down the old order—build up the new. Lordee, we need it! What is the moral law anyway then but a question of expedience? A question of economics! That's all . . . the world simply isn't prepared to look out for its children and so they put a stigma on any one who brings a child here without money or a father to look after it! What else is the difference between the child born inside of wedlock and the child born outside of it?

"And what has the moral law got to do with the inner decencies to-day? You don't hear of any moral law against a woman selling herself for money, do you? Provided, of course, she wears a white dress and a veil on the day the transaction is made.

"All bunk, ole thing! All surface! What you did was right enough! Don't let any one kid you out of that. It's what

you're getting that's wrong. Let me tell you the world has more to live up to than you or I have to live down!"

Chickie leaned over to Janina. Her lips were ghastly, they were so white: "Janina—if you had a daughter would you want her to do as I did?"

Janina shrugged and wouldn't answer.

"You wouldn't! And it was selfish. If you excuse every other phase you'll still have to say it was selfish and in the end we always cheat ourselves, when it's only ourselves we wish to serve."

"We're born selfish, little one."

"We don't have to remain selfish—"

"I don't know about that! Put a yacht on the waters, fling out its sails, then let the wind spring up—off goes your boat. It's made that way. Same with us! Victims of the life forces all of us, if just the tide runs high enough and we happen to get in the way—"

"We can keep our eyes open, Janina, and run when the tide is rising."

"If we're that cautious—yes—better still, grab off a marriage license. Then it's all right! That's what gets my goat on the proposition. Nothing wrong with the tide but only with the luck of the one who rides it.

"And that's what makes me so sick with these judgments. They can't condemn the deed you did. But only the consequence. That's why I'm scot free to-day and you're handed a letter with paragraphs like that. Isn't it a joke?"

"No—no, really, Janina. It's not at all funny."

"Well, it would be if it happened to me. I'd take that letter and flounce it down as cool as you please before the head of every hospital in the city. I'd laugh in their faces and ask if they ate when they were hungry, shivered when they were cold, and, as our poor Shylock adds—do they grin when they're tickled! I'll go with you, Chickie."

Chickie reached over and twitched the letter impatiently from under Janina's hands. From an utter pallor, her cheeks were now scarlet—her eyes hot. . . .

She said faintly: "It means a thing or two, Janina, to lose twenty months and everything—"

"You won't lose it—Chickie—I'm sure there's some place where they have sense enough to live in the twentieth century. Well—anyway—you can get other jobs."

"Yes—I'll have to. You know I've only received $10 a month for nearly two years—well—I'm about broke—"

Janina looked down and very carefully folded her napkin. She said quietly: "How's Jake? You hear from him?"

"Yes—"

"And you go out with him."

"Yes—"

"And you are what you are! Good Lord! And miracles!"

"There never was such a friend, Janina—"

"Friend!" Then Janina laughed and added softly: "What in the name of God, Chickie Bryce, do you want?"

Janina began to talk, rapidly—brightly. They went to a movie. She tucked her arm finally in Chickie's: "I'll find out about that, Chickie. I'll go and inquire myself at hospitals. Let me do this—"

"It wouldn't do a bit of good. I know. I've given up the idea completely."

When Chickie reached home Jennie was at the telephone. She said: "Here she is now—"

Chickie shook her head. Jennie said again: "She's just come in!"

Then she added in an important whisper: "Well—it's the doctor. He's called four times—hurry."

CHAPTER XLV

BRAVING IT

CHICKIE took the receiver, the chords of her throat tightening. She heard his voice. An impulse to press the hook down softly, hold it down till he lost patience and hung up, possessed her.

Then he said sharply, "Hello—you're there!"

"Why, yes—I am now—"

A laugh: "Outsmarted you that time! You didn't keep your appointment."

"I didn't get here at twelve."

"Logical enough. You got the credits all right?"

"Yes—I got them."

"Fine. Then you'll see Mrs. Ellis Monday between two and three. I told her you were coming."

"Oh—did you? I've changed my plans. I won't be able to go Monday."

"Why?"

It came so quietly she had no answer and hedged: "I can't explain—but you know—"

Jennie, rosy with anxiety, was all this while standing in the doorway, twisting her apron in her hands. She didn't mean to pry. She was merely excited and curious.

Chickie, now warm with nervousness, repeated: "I've just decided on something else—"

"Do you mean that you don't wish to transfer?"

"Not exactly."

"What is it that you've decided on?"

She pressed her mouth hard against the phone—unable, for a moment, to command the slightest word. Finally she said, in a faint, half despairing tone: "It's just as I told you before. I don't think I'd be accepted."

"Yes, you will. The best way to make sure of that is to try. I've made the arrangements. Please don't ball them up."

She tried twice to ask: "Did you see the letter of recommendation, Doctor David?" But no forcing would bring the

glaring question forth. She answered instead: "Oh, all right—I'll go—"

"Helena, you won't break this appointment?"

"No—I'll keep it—"

She forgot Jennie. She stood with her hands on the hook—clammy, yet hot, trying to tell herself: "What of it—it doesn't matter—one thing more—what of it—"

But Jennie repeated: "Chickie! What is it? What is the matter?"

"Oh—you there, Miss Jennie?"

"What did he want? You're all upset—"

"Yes—you see—there's a chance. Well—he knows of a place in another hospital, and he wants me to try to get it."

"Leave where you are? Is that wise?"

Jennie's eyes grew big. Chickie took the telephone book and very precisely hung it on a small screw. "I guess it's wise. If I can get it—he thinks so—"

And Jonathan had to hear about it. By this time Chickie's story was clear and glowing. . . . Why—big opportunities! And who knows—she might be something yet!

She talked thus gayly. Within her was a chilly quiet and deeper than this a turmoil and a clash. She moved about precisely. She stacked the dishes and very methodically brushed crumbs from the pantry shelf.

Never mind regretting. Stop it now! She was going. The promise was made. She tried to steel herself in this way; tried to shut down the sick, warm excitement.

That night when Jennie and Jonathan were asleep she sat at her desk in the sun room, the crumpled letter of recommendation before her. She smoothed it again and again, rubbing her fist gently back and forth.

She pasted the sharply torn strips together. Janina said to do that.

Then press it between the leaves of the old Britannica Encyclopedia—Jonathan's first anniversary gift to his bride. Ho—Jennie began to read the cumbersome volumes before Chickie was born, hoping that her child would be a genius—brilliant and noble!

Chickie had often heard the tale. She thought of it and reread as though she craved its pain, the fateful paragraph . . . "Helena Bryce, then and since unmarried, became a mother—the child died—there was an inquest—"

Well—true, wasn't it?

So Janina could accept it; could baldly say: "Is it a crime to love? To have a child? How are you tainted?"

Chickie shut her eyes now in a mute recoil from Janina's facile exoneration. On a chair in the corner was Jennie's work basket. Across the back of the chair were many stockings. They were mated and now waited to be darned. Years and years Chickie had seen a chair draped in this wise.

Jennie would take up the mending with a fervor. Then Jonathan would come in. She would stand up, one sock over her hand, and wait while the old fellow kissed her. Then the smile on her face as she settled again in the roomy chair, and the tender way she drew the needle across the hole.

This was her life—these thousand drab monotonies turned into holy things because they meant a thousand loyalties. And how these two had stood to each other in all the little things and then in big—

Why, they expected always the best and finest in each other. That time when Chickie lay half dazed and the sheriff had come to make her go away—that time even Jonathan had said: "Stay, mother! It is for you to stay!"

For this their marriage meant—measure up. So they rode the tide of life.

Chickie's eyes filled. Something heroic about it. Call this love—but what Janina meant was shoddy enough and cheap enough and tainting enough before the strong, enduring faith of this.

She put the letter in the book and put three heavy volumes on top of it. Oh, by Monday, perhaps, the wrinkles would be gone. And she would take the letter quietly and show it—not flounce it down and laugh in Mrs. Ellis' face.

For she didn't feel so about it—not quite. But what was done was done. She would admit. She would say simply that it was past—she was not chained to it—nor would be—

Sunday she kept repeating such thoughts and stealing in to see how the letter looked.

Once it occurred to her like a revelation that David Ramm couldn't know of this letter. He would be shamed to the soul to have recommended her and then have her come to his friend with such a flaming record behind her.

His eyes would flash with anger.

She answered this: "He must know! He can't be stupid. Every one hears."

But before the day was over she went to the phone and

called up Phyllis Stone. She hardened herself for rebuff. When she said, "This is Bryce," she almost felt a vibrance over the wires, and Phyllis, in her low, sweet voice, answered: "At last! Why didn't you call sooner? I'm worried about your trunk."

Chickie said: "You know, Phyllis? You know I've left, and all?"

"Well—I guess so—"

"Does every one know?"

"Some do—well, Miss Simonds pledged us not to speak of it—but some heard. Helena—I don't care. I don't!"

They talked on. Chickie didn't know whether she was glad or sorry for the information.

When she started out Monday afternoon, pounds of lead in her purse would not have weighed more deadeningly than this letter.

Jennie put up her hands and drew Chickie's face down. "Are you sure, dear—sure that you should transfer? I always believed in finishing what you start—"

"Oh, mother—such an old-fashioned lady! Finish a thing, even if it's the wrong thing? Well—I may not transfer, after all." She ran down the steps, her knees trembling.

Well, if he didn't know about this letter, after all!

The hospital was in the northern part of the city. Chickie got off the car two blocks before she came to it.

This was a fatal thing to do. She thought, "I can't go in!" She was almost suffocated with the heat—though it was a lilting, bonny day that June.

She walked slowly. Oh—show a stranger this letter—walk in there coolly and say, "Why—yes—it's true—"

She walked around the block. It was after two. Then suddenly she saw David Ramm's car. She turned back.

She could see Sausalito—and the sails of yachts—clean and shining above the waters. It occurred to her that he might have seen her—he might just have entered. She remembered the way he looked at her—the way he had clasped her hands, saying: "You'll do that, won't you?"

Well—she was what she was—and she would meet his look—any one's look—she would have to!

She walked up the hospital steps. She said to the girl at the switchboard breathlessly: "Will you tell Mrs. Ellis that Miss Bryce is here?"

The girl pointed down the hall. "Go right in."

CHAPTER XLVI

THE JUDGMENT

THE hall was lightsome. Halfway down was a projecting sign. Chickie read clearly: "Superintendent of Nurses."

In her thought a voice said: "Right there. Go in now. It's done. Admit it!" The emptiness was full of voices; of forms pressing close. Emotions beat on her heart. They smothered her.

She stood at the door and tapped lightly. The frail sound thundered in her ears; set up a turning and a faintness. She tapped again more softly. No one there. An uncontrollable sob rushed to her throat. No one there! Don't have to meet it!

The door pulled back; a nurse all in white came out: "Oh—pardon! Did you knock? Are you looking for Mrs. Ellis? Right over there—"

Standing at the desk, as though waiting, was a tall, stout woman with a large and very determined face. The cap looked insignificant perched in the middle of her head, above a mass of straight, rusty brown hair.

She said abruptly: "Miss Bryce? Come right over."

Chickie walked swiftly, stood opposite Mrs. Ellis and forced herself to meet the long intent glance. She looked into fighting eyes and a mouth doubled up, the lips wide and clenched together. Her hope fell.

But she said: "I've come to see about transferring."

"Yes—Dr. Ramm told me. When do you wish to enter?"

"Oh—right away, I thought—that is—if it can be arranged."

"Well, be seated, Miss Bryce. We'll see." Mrs. Ellis pulled the collar from her wide, muscular neck and shook it with a long: "Whew—very warm—you want to begin at once? You'll have to get your uniforms. I'll give you a list of things you'll need. You've brought your credits and your record, have you?"

All this while the boring eyes were fixed on Chickie's face. They were like a fire and drew the blood in bright stains so

that even Chickie's throat was burning. She said: "Yes—I've brought my record." Her hand was limp and trembled so that she found it difficult to open her purse. In her mind she was seeing the pasted sheet of paper—seeing Mrs. Ellis examine it.

She held the papers a moment, trying with a maddening effort to explain; at least to say: "You may not know why I'm leaving—that I'm forced to transfer—"

Mrs. Ellis reached across the desk without a word. Chickie put the bundle in her hand.

She laid them before her, glanced swiftly down the report and even more swiftly turned the pages of Miss Simonds' letter. She didn't notice the sheet pasted; didn't pause over the incriminating paragraph.

She adjusted her glasses: "Well—a very creditable record, Miss Bryce. I'll look it over carefully and see how the work you have done corresponds with our course. You're entirely free to enter, are you?"

"Oh—why, yes—"

"Well—if you want to enter at once, get your uniforms—"

"Yes—I will—" But Chickie's brain set up a clashing. Mrs. Ellis didn't read the recommendation—didn't know. He hadn't told her! She repeated: "Yes—I'll get the uniforms."

But she sat there motionless, knowing well that her testing had come; summoning her strength to meet it. What she had done, she must face—what she was, she must admit—a hot obstruction at her throat kept the breath from her.

Mrs. Ellis said, "Well—then I suppose that's all, Miss Bryce. I'm sure you'll like it here—"

"It's not all, Mrs. Ellis." She leaned forward, clasped her hands on the desk, and turned a face now pitifully white to the superintendent. She said again: "No—it isn't all. You didn't read that letter. Did Doctor Ramm tell you why I was transferring?"

Mrs. Ellis, for the first time didn't look at Chickie. She gathered the papers, answering ambiguously: "He said you would bring your record, of course. I shall go over it carefully. You may go now and make all your arrangements."

"No—you don't understand. I don't wish to have any misunderstanding—" She half stood. She said with a rush and break in the low tones: "You see—I am not transferring of my own will. I am forced to transfer. You don't know that—perhaps—"

She pointed to the letter. "Read that—you'll have to read that first."

"Is it so very urgent, Miss Bryce?"

Chickie sat down again, her head lowered. She said quietly: "Very urgent, Mrs. Ellis. I think I have a right to finish my course. I think I have a right to ask admittance. You may not think so. But I will have to know. If you don't mind, I want to know now."

She closed her eyes. She heard the papers rustle. Infinite moments passed. She felt as though a great flatiron went over her heart, pressing out its life.

When she could no longer endure it she looked up and saw Mrs. Ellis rubbing her thumb over the rough, pasted edges, her mouth more doubled and tightly clenched than before.

Chickie pushed from the table. She would take it gracefully. No argument, no protest. She felt icy and stricken, a terrible muteness stealing through her veins.

Mrs. Ellis shoved her glasses to her forehead, then back again hastily. She gave Chickie a sharp, challenging look, a gleam in the fighting eyes. "That wasn't easy to do, Miss Bryce."

"What do you mean?"

Mrs. Ellis smiled. She folded all the papers. "When I was in France, Miss Bryce, I saw men go down into hell through fields of horror; through channels noisome with death. One dares not think of it now. I saw them come up again—some—stronger and braver and cleaner than they went in—a thousand times tested and proved. No—I wouldn't have war to make men strong; nor tragedy to make women fine. But this is often life's way. In the end it's not the road we travel, but the goal we reach, that counts."

Chickie listened, her heart like a great cup filling and rushing warmly over. She kept her eyes hard before her.

"Well, I have read the paragraph, Miss Bryce."

"Yes."

"So now, if you have nothing else to say, make your arrangements—"

"Ho—you mean to admit me? Oh, really?" She drew in her breath sharply with an acute physical pain. "I may come?"

"Didn't you say you had a right to enter?"

"Yes—I said that—"

"I am admitting you, Miss Bryce. You can prove that you

have the right. I admit you on your record of the past twenty months, and especially on the recommendation of Dr. Ramm. Measure up to that and we won't quarrel—"

Mrs. Ellis stood up. She was extending to Chickie a long, firm hand: "I don't mind saying, Miss Bryce, that I agree with you. You have a right to be judged by the heights you have reached and not by the wrungs whereon you have climbed. I would be glad, though, to have no mention made of this to any one. It isn't at all necessary. This experience is yours. It cannot hurt another. And there is no reason why you should be punished that others may be warned. That is a maudlin view. For my part, if others can be saved from wrong only by seeing the brand sizzle on a brother's forehead—let them be lost. They are not worth the saving! Well—the shame is not in failing, but in hugging fast to our failure, in keeping company with it and refusing to put it away. . . .

"Have I, or has any one, the right to force such an alternative on any one, Miss Bryce? I think not. . . ." She held Chickie's hand and walked with her to the door.

Chickie wished to speak. She kept her teeth shut very tight. Finally she said, "Thank you—"

Mrs. Ellis said: "Come when you are ready—"

Chickie stood a moment and looked at her. Her eyes filled. She could have dropped on her knees before the stout, homely woman and blessed her . . .

She rushed down the hall—rushed down the steps. Admitted— Finish now— Win—oh, anything—

She was half blinded with the mist in her eyes. Reaching the sidewalk, she saw the machines but in a blur; saw some one coming to her, hat off. She didn't stop.

But it was Dr. David. He took her arm. He was smiling at her. "All fixed up, is it? . . . I'm going your way. I'll drive you there."

CHAPTER XLVII

REVENGE

Dr. Ramm stooped down to her, face warm and intent with interest: "Are we all settled now?"

Seeing his head bared and the eager, smiling look in his deep eyes, she took a little sobbing breath and tried to laugh, to say: "Oh—good in you to wait—" But her nerves were bright and piercing like so many needles.

So she couldn't answer, but followed him, unresistant, let him help her to the car.

When he saw the whiteness of her face, the little trembling movements about her lips and that she couldn't speak nor even look at him, he was disturbed and would have brought his arm protectingly about her.

She felt his eyes and as he touched the wheel glanced up swiftly. "You're ever so kind, Doctor David—"

Partly because he was uneasy and partly because he wished to touch the hands clasped so inert and wistful in her lap, he laughed: "How did you find Mrs. Ellis?"

"Wonderful! She's to let me enter. Whenever I wish." She drew her hands together, held them tensely against her lips. "You don't know all that means. It was so good in you! I want to tell you—"

There was in her profile such a still, excited look; he grew alarmed lest she should talk; lest she should think herself bound to speak. He drove more quickly, speeding through the Presidio: "Naturally it means a lot. You don't mind taking a short drive? Yes, Mrs. Ellis is a wonder. She's mellow—seen life from a good many angles—"

He said he had met Mrs. Ellis in France: told of his own experiences: and what a pity she wasn't a nurse then, but, of course, she was too young.

Chickie thought with a warm uprush of feeling: "He knows about me. He does! Why did he help? Oh, I wonder why he bothered?"

She was confused and bewildered at the mingling of her

emotions. She wished to say again and again—"I'm accepted, you know. Why did you do this for me? You think I'm worth it? Perhaps—well—"

He looked so fine—his eyes just then met hers, laughing—tender. She was overwhelmed and turned suddenly to look at the waters.

They were stopped at the cliff just above the Golden Gate. It was serene—scarcely a wave save when the seals went diving in the troughs.

Chickie looked far out—an unbearable melancholy in her thoughts. It seemed to her that she was the only one in the world who had ever offended—all else was beautiful and clean like the shiny waters.

And he, sitting there beside her, was cleaner and nobler than any. She would have liked to get out—to walk and walk. She kept thinking of lines she had read in that old green book of Martha Blake's—

> "Come up hither! From this wave-washed mound
> Unto the furtherest flood brim look with me;
> Then reach on with thy thought till it be drown'd.
> Miles and miles distant though the last line be,
> And though thy soul sail leagues and leagues beyond—
> Still, leagues beyond those leagues, there is more sea."

She turned from him. There was a droop to her shoulders and to the pale, parted lips that enhanced poignantly their appeal. Her whole figure was eloquent of the spiritual pain in her thought. It moved him with an odd, fighting pity for her. In a quick impulse, he slipped his arms about her, took both her hands and closed them between his own.

For moments she could scarcely breathe. Her eyes filled. But she turned quietly and asked: "Why did you do all this for me, Doctor David?"

Her eyes held him and the sweet youngness of her face and its tragic earnestness. He would have liked to draw her close—not to answer. He wished to sweep away those things that hurt her—sweep them away and hold her.

She was astonished at the kindling and the challenge in his face; astonished and unnerved. She drew her hands swiftly from his. His face reddened.

She gave a soft, uneasy laugh: "I ask, you know—well—

because I seem always to be beginning. And never arriving. Isn't that an odd way to be, Doctor David? I begin and begin—"

He was leaning down, fooling with the gears. He said in a hoarse, throaty tone: "This isn't a beginning—you'll go on from where you left off. I'm glad you've transferred."

"Why?"

He laughed and was careless again. "They need a good surgical nurse . . ."

"And I'm to be that very thing, am I?"

"See to it that you are."

They scarcely spoke driving home. A few blocks from Fair Oaks, he slowed the car. He asked quietly: "Helena, you'll begin at once, won't you?"

"Perhaps—"

"Yes—there's no reason for delay—" He helped her out at the door and walked up the steps as though he were loath to leave. He kept looking at her. But she could not meet his eyes. Then he said: "Well—let me know when you enter—"

The intensity of his gaze touched her like a command. She looked up, flushing: "Yes, I will . . ."

He smiled . . .

She ran into the living room and stood a moment at the piano—wondering why she found it so hard to breathe; why her cheeks burned.

Jennie came in, flushed and nervous: "You were so long, dear! Did you change—hurry—your friend is here waiting."

"Who! What friend?"

"Phyllis—I've made tea—it's just ready—in the sun room."

Chickie stole into Jennie's room—cooled her face—flung off her hat. She wanted to be alone—wanted not to speak—not to think—

She had not seen Phyllis in ten days—a life time had passed in those days.

Phyllis blushed, her moist, brown eyes averted when Chickie spoke. She said in her soft, musical voice: "Did you want me to come, Helena?"

"Of course—I'm glad you did—" Chickie closed the door. "You didn't say anything to my mother, did you? She doesn't know that I had to leave—"

"I guessed that—no, I didn't speak . . . I thought you'd want to know lots of things, do you?"

"Yes—well—I do. I want to know who has my room—who has my place on the annual . . ."

"Gates has your room, of course. I'm editor. Irene wanted it like fury, but every one is sore at her."

"Why? On account of me?"

Phyllis looked down and nodded. Chickie said in a tight, strained tone: "Does every one blame her for it?"

"Oh, well—you know how they are, and she did a lot of talking in the beginning. Every one knew she was terribly jealous."

"Phyllis, did she think I wanted her friend? I mean Dr. Harmon—did she?"

"Oh, you know—a girl always blames some one when she loses out. Yes—she blamed you. She said you broke up her affair, so she was going to pay you back and see how you'd like it when your own match was spoiled—" Phyllis laughed. "Isn't that ridiculous!"

"What match have I?"

"Don't you even know? She accused you often enough—"

"Surely not Dr. Ramm?"

Again Phyllis lowered her head and nodded. "Yes. She told me that was her reason for telling what she had found out. Because a doctor like he is would want a girl with prestige and money and—"

A sudden weakness overcame her. She sat down and reached for a cup. It trembled violently against the saucer. She laughed in a soft, harsh way that made Phyllis blush: "So, of course, he wouldn't want a girl who has nothing but a past? Is that what she said, Phyllis?"

"I didn't pay any attention to her. I knew you never thought of him at all. I told her so—"

Chickie was white. She said faintly: "I suppose she sent him an anonymous letter, too, did she?"

"I don't know. . . . Perhaps she did. . . ."

CHAPTER XLVIII

NEW BONDS

JONATHAN set down the suitcases and gave a forlorn survey to the four walls that would now be Chickie's home. He put his arm about her, raising the soft, young face in his hand: "Guess you know best, Chickie girl. But the other place was a heap brighter. Sure you're not sorry you changed?"

"Oh, shush with your glooms! Shallow old fellow, judging by outsides."

"But 'tain't much of a home, is it?"

"No—'tain't!"

"Maybe you'll come often, then?" Getting old now, was Jonathan and wistful. Sometimes when he looked at her, tears rushed into her eyes. He seemed glad about that and chuckled.

She watched him walking down the narrow hall. This nurses' home was a rented place near the hospital—a gloomy old place and the window of Chickie's room looked down on gray back yards, cement alley ways and clothes lines.

The room was orderly but without color; without any hominess. Miss Elizabeth Pruett was Chickie's new roommate—a spare, taciturn girl, olive skinned and precise. She welcomed Chickie gravely: "I hope we shall be friends. I hope you're going to like it."

Then she picked up a notebook and went out.

Alone now and beginning again. Coming here there had been a song of triumph in her thoughts. It left no echoes. She felt drab and very quiet. That first night she longed for Myrtle's endless talk—she longed for a sight of the hills and a sky with milk white stars.

She read over a telegram Jake had sent. For she wrote and told him briefly that she had transferred—oh, just for a change; just to gad about, you know—

He felt between the breezy lines. for he wired back: "What means all this, my darling? Write more, and tell the truth for once in your life. For one old dog is coming back and he'll

get his nose into things. Then some one is going to be chewed up! Be sure of that. Helena, perhaps you'll make another change. God wot—it will be the last . . ."

She mused idly of this . . . Jake really wanted that—oh, what did he care for this triumph she longed to win? What did it mean? What did she need to prove? To the devil with all of them! That was his way . . .

But this change was the last. It would have to be! All things end—even life must grow tired of playing the same tricks on the same people . . .

She went resolutely to her new service. But it was strange and even commonplace after the days she had known. For days she couldn't get used to the many private rooms, to the smallness of the place and the shut-inness of it. She had a wish to let in the sun and air, a longing for the wide, glowing gardens, the long corridors, the many wards, the children and all the surging vitality of the place she had left.

Even the girls seemed older and a little smug.

But then Mrs. Ellis came to her, a brisk look in the fighting eyes: "How do you like us, Miss Bryce?"

Chickie was so filled with gratitude she answered impulsively: "I'm going to love it. Oh, as soon as I feel more familiar with things. Do you think I'll do?"

"Why, my dear girl, you better do!" She laughed.

Then Chickie wished that Mrs. Ellis would ask her to do some impossible, fearful task—wished she would ask her to stay up for a whole week without sleep—oh, something gigantic. That would prove things!

She went about with a new fervor. Doctor David teased her about it; called her a hysterical little prob. He said: "Lady, lady—save your strength—you're going to need it one of these days on a worth-while job."

The worth-while job came before Chickie was a month in the new hospital.

Of all her experiences this remained, starkest and most cruel.

It was a child—one year old—lovely, with soft brown hair and long straight lashes—like a sleeping doll all pink and white it lay on the table when they prepared it for the operation.

And they knew almost before starting that there was but one wild fighting chance. Scarcely that—

The baby's head was crushed. Its own mother, herself but a girl, was carrying it downstairs when her heel caught. She

fell forward—struck against the bannister, the child doubled in her arms.

They were friends of David's—dear friends of his.

As he came to the operating room, the mother followed. She caught his hand, raising a face of white, insane anguish, reached her arms to his neck: "David, you can! David—you've got to!"

He looked at her for an instant and bit his lips. Then he said something softly and spoke to the father, who was young and now shaking from head to foot. Chickie caught a glimpse of the girl cowering in her husband's arms.

The door closed on an hour of swift, luminous intensity—the heart of life quivering and open and they working therein—scarcely a breath—scarcely a move—David's face became mask-like in its flaming concentration. He didn't speak—he reached for the instruments—unaware of movements about him—never shifting his glance from his work. . . . Awesome and silent—that fight against death . . .

It seemed to Chickie that he was down in a pit—alone—that his face shed a light about him—that he poured a radiance on the still, tiny form. She could see the brain—fancied it quivered under his touch—

They moved the child back to the room. . . .

Chickie watched that night. The mother and father—rigid—utterly gray knelt at the bed. Every hour the mother touched Chickie's hand—"Alive?"

"Yes—"

Then she would try to speak . . . but the husband would pull her into his arms and kiss her. . . .

At 3 o'clock David came in. He said: "Beth—I'll stay—go and rest. . . ."

She shook her head.

"Yes— You will— Now come—" She followed—and clung to his arm.

There was that night and all the next day. David said once to Chickie: "How in the name of God am I to tell them?"

"No hope?"

"Of course not. Better dead—now—"

Yet he watched and fought. The little face, scarcely visible through the bandages, was quiet. Then there was no further breath.

David stood up, his hands dropped to his sides. The girl ran to him, with a most awful, inarticulate cry; with fearful little animal sounds of pain, she flung herself against him: "David—you didn't—not gone—oh, God—"

The young father caught her. They were wound in each other's arms, clinging and crying . . . The girl collapsed.

Chickie had to wrap the child. Hardest of all sad things she had ever done. She looked at the little still face—so lovely with the character already tracing itself on the sweet infant features—anguish this! Oh, pain, a thousandfold more terrible than hers.

Unaware she said: "Oh—oh—" and worked swiftly in an aching frenzy.

She had to change all the dressings—and the skull was so crushed—so soft—

Some one entered the room, stood motionless against the door. It was David. His face was white and drawn. He leaned there in utter exhaustion.

She went on with her work, unable to bear the look in his eyes. He came over and stood at her side. Then he pushed her gently: "I'll do it. Poor little nurse—"

He bent down, tender as a woman, and finished the wrapping. Then he said: "Come out—you need the air."

She saw that he was desperately touched—that he wanted piercingly some word—some company. He looked so thin and spent, she longed to go up and touch his hands—say some gracious thing. . . .

He said: "Come—won't you—you're free now—"

She got her coat and drove with him.

CHAPTER XLIX

THE RIDE

He drove swiftly, glancing at her with an anxious: "Are you very tired?"

"No—not at all."

They sped through the park. The trees shot past; at the beach the waters went flashing white, were gone. The highways opened.

"Do you care if we drive far?"

"No—I'd like it. Drive a long way—"

They struck into the hills above Burlingame, winding and curving. Soft purple shadows rimmed with silver thronged the trees. The yellow light went with them, arm in arm—hurried and was lost. This gathering of the dark distilled about them a penetrant sadness. They were rushing from it. It followed. It was everywhere.

He said half to himself: "Oh, damnable!"

The girl's agonized face was in Chickie's mind and her short, choking cry, beseeching: "David, you can! David, you've got to!"

She glanced at him. He looked down, white and intent as though answering her thought: "I couldn't do a thing—not a thing. If ever I wanted skill—"

"Could any skill do more? You did everything—everything—"

He drew a sharp, hard breath: "I suppose so. Nothing could be done—"

He drove more slowly. They were above the trees now—above the earth on a lovely, windless curve. All the shadows were one save where the moon walked through them, swaying in amber gauze.

He lit a cigarette, it burned slowly, down to the edge, unpuffed. "And if it lived the brain might suffer. Most probably would. But I know how this will get them—I've known them years. They thought theirs was the only child ever

born. They were foolish about it. I suppose Beth thought I could save it—"

He spoke in a questioning way, looking at her eagerly as though asking a confirmation of his own knowledge. It touched her as when he stood, white and spent at the door, leaning in that attitude of exhaustion.

She said softly, her eyes brimming: "No one could do more. They know it. You were wonderful to them."

"The horrible part of a thing like this is the blame she'll take to herself."

"Oh—how can she—how could she know—" Suddenly Chickie fancied the girl picking up the baby, laughing at it, putting its soft cheek against her own as she started down the stairs, then that soulless moment, the blind plunge downward—the little thing crushed and broken in her arms.

Tears flashed into her eyes. She said in a swift, unthinking impulse: "I thought I knew what pain could be—"

"Yes?"

"Oh, yes—but such pain can be endured—it must be since one has brought it to himself. But this is so causeless—so without purpose. That makes it intolerable—just fiendish—"

He was looking at her. She said eagerly: "How could she deserve such a thing? How could any one?"

"Freud says there is no such thing as an accident. Nothing is causeless. Even a thing like this we bring to ourselves. We are answerable for all that happens to us. The subconscious mind directs us when the things we call accidents happen—"

Chickie's lips parted in a gasp of denial: "You don't believe that? What a beast the subconscious mind must be and what an enemy to our better thought. Do you believe it?"

"No—there's too much guess about it. But we are responsible for many things that seem accidental—"

"That sounds so hard—"

"It is hard. It is much more comforting to blame some remote impersonal fate—"

"But in a case like this—oh, surely—surely—"

"Not in a case like this—of course not—you said a moment ago, Helena, that pain can be endured when we have brought it to ourselves. How does that make it easier? I should think that would weight the load—"

She turned her eyes to the tree tops and then to a pearl white cloud drifting like a boat on some forgotten sea. And she said quietly: "It doesn't lessen pain. But it strengthens endurance—or it should. We ought to be brave, anyway, to take the consequences we have courted. Oh, David—don't you think that!"

She was unconscious of the name she had used, but it flew into his mind warmly, trilling like a bird song.

Her face was uplifted, the pale glow from the moon made it unearthly in its delicacy. She seemed a spirit, star-like in beauty. When her eyes sought his, smiling: "David—you think that?" he leaned forward and reached out his arms.

But she went on, her voice dropping to a distant murmur: "We should be glad even to suffer. I think so—if this is what we need to make us strong. We should never let any one know! Never! But just go right on. . . . Well, we have to!"

Suddenly she was aware of all she had said. A faint color spread upward over her cheeks.

But she kept her face lifted, her eyes level. He would have covered her hands with his swiftly for he felt glad, and all along his nerves went a quick stir of admiration.

He wanted to tell her of it. For she seemed suddenly glowing and strong—beautiful as the night.

A hundred times in these last weeks he had watched Chickie—the thought of the tragic past had filled him with pity. But it was not pity awakened in his mind now.

He said with his eyes holding hers: "Yes—go right on—" and he was smiling.

She felt that he looked into her soul; that she had bared it. The moment paused. Then he said quietly: "I'm glad that you came with me, to-night."

"I wanted to come. . . ."

"We'll have to go back now." He started the engine slowly, as though reluctant to leave, and he added abruptly: "It's beautiful here—isn't it?"

"Yes—" A vague unrest came into her heart and she would not look at him again. She said faltering: "You're not coming back to the hospital, are you, Dr. David?"

"Yes, Nurse Helena."

"Why?"

"Beth is there. I told them to keep her. They may need

me. I don't like leaving Tim. Perhaps I should not have gone at all. I had to."

"You got no sleep last night."

"I don't need much. Sleep is easily recovered. You ought to be learned enough to know that."

It was late—nearly 11 when they reached the hospital. As he helped her out he asked: "Did I keep you up too long?"

"No—"

"Well—I was glad for one thing to-night—"

"What—"

"That you were here instead of over there. You're a good little nurse. Yes, you are—"

The tears rushed to her eyes—she laughed. He walked into the building with her. He seemed thin and very pale. She would have been glad to work along with him through the night—stand at his side no matter how hard the toil.

She said so: "Let me go, too—I might be needed."

"You will be—many times. You did enough for one week—"

Yet he seemed as loath to go on as she was to part. She had a sense of comradeship that was new and different—made him seem close—

In her room, her thoughts followed him. What was he doing? What words would he say now to the mother? And to the young father who was such an old friend of his . . .

He would watch with him through the night—heedless of himself. She lay awake in a state of trembling excitement. She saw his face as he had worked over the child and she had fancied him in a pit alone—fighting against death—a light radiant from his eyes . . .

Then the moment when he had reached out his arms to hold her returned. She closed her eyes swiftly—pressing her hands against her throat . . .

CHAPTER L

A NOD FROM BARRY

"HEARD you were here, Chickie. Just thought I'd look you up. Long time, no see. By Henry, you're prettier than ever. Sa fact!"

Chickie recognized the voice. It went with a little sickening cut along her nerves. She put down her charts and smiled at the dumpy, rotund little fellow standing at the door of the treatment room.

"By Henry—you make some nurse! I'll tell the world! Sure enough I will—" Nicky, no longer bachelor, but retaining all his gallant smiles, twinkling eyes and red, merry face, put out a fat hand: "Shake, girlie—guess you know I got trapped, eh? Wife's down stairs now visiting her sister. Young son and heir in the sister's family. Know her? Mrs. Oberling— Heard you were here through Tim Daniels—fellow whose wife fell with the baby. Sad, awful—wasn't it? Beth doesn't seem to get over it . . . melancholy—shouldn't be surprised if her mind's touched—"

Then Nicky stood on his toes. He just about reached Chickie's ear. "Say, Chickie, I hear it's all settled between you and Jake. Be a sport and tell your old pal, Nick."

"Indeed—did you hear that or dream it, Nicky?"

"Gosh, now, I haven't lost all my gifts because of taking a wife. Gossip and Nicky, you know!"

Chickie laughed, hiding her sharp uneasiness. "You old fox, Nicky, with your tail cut off! Do you really think you could wish the same calamity on Jake? 'Tis to laugh when one speaks of Jake in whispers!"

Nicky rolled his head between his shoulders. "Look at myself! Shows you never can tell. Glad to see you looking so fine. I'll run along now. May be up to see you again while the wife visits!"

He went wagging stoutly down the hall. Chickie thought absently: "I suppose people do a lot of talking. I suppose they have much to say!"

Two or three days later she was coming down the steps of the hospital. She was going home for dinner. She met David. He was in a hurry, but swept off his hat. "I got those X-rays. Thought you'd be interested. Coming back later? I'll drive over and bring you back. How's that?"

He gave her a quick smile. It went with a bright glow of pleasure into her mind. Her thoughts took on a warmth so that when a voice called out her name, she stopped as though suddenly aroused. Her face suffused with color.

It was Nicky. His wife was just getting into the car. She was a dark, serious girl, about 28. She wore a brown suit, a brown hat and a pair of new white gloves. She had a very conscientious air.

Nicky said in a soft drawl: "So that's the way the wind blows. Give us the low down, Chickie. Is it our friend Dave you're smiling at? Makes it nice for these doctors. I tried to get his eye but he was in such a hurry he didn't see me for a gnat! Notice he had time for you! Eh?"

His wife frowned. She was irritable and obviously bored with her mate. "Don't mind him, Miss Bryce," she apologized. "You may think you're very witty, Nicholas. Do you suppose Miss Bryce enjoys this?"

"Now, look here, Bertha, Chickie and I were pals before you'd got one smile from your friend husband! And if she's going to pick off my friend Dave, I'm gonna be the first to hear the news and the first to breeze it hither and yon!"

"Yes. You are, are you? No doubt by the time David is ready for such affairs you'll have plenty of time to learn."

Nicky shrugged: "Oh, these wives, Chickie—that's the way they henpeck us—even tough old birds." He waved the fat hand: "But you'll send me an underground, won't you?"

Chickie said quietly and giving Nicky a cold, hostile look: "Dr. Ramm was speaking of a patient and giving me orders about it. You suppose, Nicky, that I am thinking of marriage?"

He answered bluffly, but the color flying into his face: "I used to say the same!"

She wondered at his crudeness, and riding home became burningly alarmed. Nicky was chatty as an old woman. If he started such a rumor it would fly everywhere. Their names would be coupled.

Then the whispered talk would begin. . . . She viewed this possibility with a sickening recoil.

How cheap the words of others can make a thing. How utterly sordid!

And every one would wonder what David could be thinking of. Ruin his future—linking it with hers—

She saw herself coldly as these others would and it suddenly appalled her that she had allowed a friendship to grow—that she had so carelessly gone out with him. . . . An oppression, like a load of lead clamped about her neck—

She decided, as she walked nervously up Fair Oaks: "This is the end of it. I won't go out with him. Not again!"

But they had tickets for a concert. He wouldn't accept any excuses. Finally she solaced her thoughts: "Perhaps he knows!" She could never completely make up her mind on this point. . . .

The concert was about half over when she noticed, at an oblique angle three rows in front of them, a girl with gold hair done high above a very white neck. She recognized it even at half a glance and before she had seen the beautifully sculptured head of Barry Dunne.

A heat shot through Chickie's veins, whirling like a flame about her face. She glanced at her program, trying to hide the scarlet of her cheeks.

She remained in this attitude. As from another world, the music came to her—then David's voice.

She had not seen Barry Dunne since that night in September . . . the night she had gone to Fisherman's Wharf—and he had waited frantically on the corner. He had walked along with her, and when they reached the lamppost noticed her feet leaving wet prints on the cement. He had stooped and touched the dripping edges of her coat.

All this came searing back into her mind, and how he had followed her into the alley, pleading, how the moonlight, soft on the climbing roses, showed him her swollen wrists; how he had stood with his face hidden against the window sash, his arms upraised. . . .

She was sitting lower and lower in her chair—unconscious of this. Suddenly David touched her hand. He said, smiling: "Beautiful—oh, hear—"

Slowly she drew herself upright—she smiled back—how tall this David looked, how fine he held his head—

She closed her eyes. She had scarcely heard a note, but she said: "Wonderful—isn't it—"

She looked about the audience, assuming a quiet air. She was afraid people would hear the thumping of her heart.

But they could easily leave without meeting—of course they could.

The concert was over. She said: "Let us hurry—warm—very warm—"

At that moment Ila Moore—almost as though she had been called, turned around. She saw David—bowed eagerly—as though in a glowing tribute, taking a quick step toward him.

Seeing Chickie, she halted, a look of shocked astonishment fixing her features. She looked again to make sure that Chickie and David were together. Then she bowed to Chickie.

As she did this Barry Dunne followed her glance. The color dropped visibly from his face leaving it dulled, like ashes. Mechanically, he nodded.

The whole thing took but a moment. In that moment Chickie forgot the concert hall, the people passing; David standing at her side.

He put the gloves in her hand. She looked up and saw, or thought she saw, a quickened gleam in his eyes, a challenge in the clinch of his jaws. Oh—she imagined that. For now he was stooping down—now he was smiling and in a gallant way fixing the collar of her coat.

"Here—little girl—your gloves—don't you want them . . ."

He saw the shaking of her hands. She didn't care—oh, make a wild dash and escape.

He took her arm and was talking to her. She answered yet wondered what words she could be finding to say—

Outside she said in a little gasp—"Hurry up!"

"No hurry! None at all—"

And he took her for a drive—to the plateau crowning Buena Vista. Many times she and that other had sat here. Almost as a living voice there came into her ears words she had spoken—often—oh, far too often: "Do you love me? Tell me that you love me!"

Suing for his endearments—begging for them. Yes! Even running her fingers along his arm, coaxingly to his neck.

That was she—that other self. Incredible it seemed.

She shivered. Then an arm went about her. . . .

"Are you cold, Helen?"

"No—"

He touched her hands. They were icy. He covered them and drew her gently, but in such an easy, quiet way as though he did it only because she were cold; only because she needed it.

It unnerved her; set a wild, tremulous sob running through to her throat. Yet she was glad for the strength of his arm just then; glad for the warmth of it. She wanted it there—wished foolishly to thank him for it.

She looked up wondering what she would see in his face. He turned it sharply—then he looked down and laughed at her: "Fooled you that time!"

CHAPTER LI

RUMOR

CHICKIE stood at her mirror, lost in thought. Her face and her eyes had a clear, ethereal look.

But she was not observing herself. She was seeing in the glass other faces—Ila Moore's, rigid with amazement. Barry Dunne's, dulled like ashes.

They were far down in the mirror, those two—and distant. Chickie found it hard to identify herself with them and with the part they had played in her life.

Hard to believe that one night she had stood behind the curtains in the living room, her heart bright with excitement as she waited his coming. How she had combed her hair! How she had polished her nails. Oh—he must find her lovely; lovelier than that other who knew of Plato and poetry and all strange philosophies. How she had laughed when he said: "Ah, dear thing—so pretty she is!"

Kneeled to him—many times. And once, white with panic, spied on him. The words he had whipped at her for this: "Sordid! Stoop to this! Lies—I can't stand it!"

Relentlessly this procession of selves before her, whispering: "I am you! I am you!" She grew faint with scorn and with heat, recognizing these images.

Push them away—the pitiful shadows—no longer hers. She stood with her eyes closed, head raised. Suddenly she thought of David, tall at her side, stooping to fix so gallantly the collar of her coat—the warmth in his eyes and the gleam kindling like a challenge.

But why? He didn't know Barry Dunne—didn't know this was the man. Of course not! He only saw that Chickie knew Ila Moore and that she was disturbed at the meeting. Well—she might be disturbed meeting any of the old crowd—naturally.

Then she wondered why Ila Moore had seemed so astonished. Was it just at the meeting? Or was it because Chickie and David were together? Helena Bryce, perhaps, had no right in such brilliant company.

Chickie sat down at the edge of her bed and considered this. She remembered her first meeting with him in the hospital the day of the blood transfusion; and he had worked with that swiftness; that surety like an inspired machine.

Then there was the time he had to amputate the hand of that little boy. How he had fought to save it—how he had come in the middle of the night to visit the youngster—

The compassion in his face when he turned and told Beth Daniels her baby was gone. Oh—the winning tenderness when he pushed Chickie aside and finished the dressing himself.

How had it happened that she, Chickie, had crossed into the life of this lofty, noble fellow; how had it come that he noticed her—even seemed to like her? To think her deep—even worth asking an opinion at times?

And how was it that now she was no longer intimidated by him? That she was so delightfully and warmly at ease—that her heart had sung when he put his arm about her because she was so cold?

Perhaps because he had a way of mocking her; because he could laugh so much or perhaps because of the habit his eyes had of glinting at some uproarious and utterly wicked joke.

Nearly a year and a quarter since the spring day they had driven down to Stanford to the track meet—and ten months they had been going to these concerts—

Well—she had a right to friendship! Even the friendship of such a man as Doctor David. Why should any one seem indignant about it? Why, above all, should Ila Moore be amazed?

Slowly Chickie began to undress and slowly the glow of her emotions chilled. Ought she really to refuse all companionship? Could she hurt others by her association? How? Because tongues would loosen and speak of things dead? How would that hurt him? She turned with a steely resentment from these faces and voices that thronged into her imagination and accused her. Let them have their paltry say! Let them sneer—she was above them! Far, far above them. They could no longer touch her!

When finally she was dropping to sleep she recalled that Ila Moore had grown stout—that she was even matronly in her look and that she had less of the bonny sparkle of those other days—

In the morning she awakened long before 6. In a chill quiet she reviewed the scene of the evening. And she said to herself: "He knows about me! He knows I was forced to transfer. So!"

And in this way she put the responsibility from her. To make the more certain of its dismissal she went to a theater with him and to the Palace afterward. She became blithe without knowing why—

And in her room again, refused to admit of any recanting. Saturday afternoon Janina came out to visit her. Janina had a suppressed, vivid look. She opened the books on Chickie's table. She talked about Stella Wilson and Nicky and Nicky's wife and she kept glancing expectantly to Chickie.

Finally she said: "When is Jake returning?"

"Any time in the next few weeks."

An uncertain pause, then Janina's lip curled: "I suppose you know, ole thing, people have you two engaged?"

"Really, Janina? Nicky was out here some time ago. He twitted me about it."

Janina's striking face had a hard, pale look: "Is it true, baby? Lord knows I wish you happiness. I really believe you could—well—you could make a go of it! No one else could!"

"It's not true, Janina—though you know all Jake has done for me—"

The hard look intensified in Janina's eyes: "Is it this David then? You mean to turn Jake down and take him?"

"You're as idiotic as Nicky! I should think you'd see clearly, Janina! What have I to do with marriage?"

"Oh, you little fool—everything!"

"Well, you're mistaken! I have nothing to do with it! Who spoke to you of David Ramm?"

"I suppose you haven't been going out with him, have you?"

Chickie went over to the window and flung it open. A dog in the cement yard was gnawing at a bone and next door a woman was beating rugs. Chickie stood there, a thunder and a ringing in her ears. Then Janina came over and put her arm at Chickie's waist: "Scuse, ole dear—please—"

Chickie looked at her in a half pleading way: "Did you know, Janina, that I saw Ila Moore and him at a concert? Well—I wonder if I have no right to go out with any man—?"

"Ask me! Do you see me sitting home and twirling my thumbs of nights?"

"The world has the goods on me. There's the difference. So they're all shouting, are they? They're all saying: 'The nerve of her! I should think she'd be glad enough to keep in hiding—brazen, scheming thing!'"

"Chickie—do you care what people say? Do you still care what they say?"

"No, I don't! Sometimes I'd like to get a big placard and pin it on my back and walk down Market Street and let them all read."

She sat down on the window sill and clasped her hands that Janina might not see their shaking. "But no one likes to feel they are hurting others—"

"Don't you suppose this doctor has some inkling about you? Didn't he get you here? Of course he knows it."

"Yes—but he may not know it all—"

Janina shrugged: "And I suppose he's immaculate Paul, is he? And you can hurt him but he can't hurt you? Beloved Satan—why wasn't I born a century hence when we'll have the courage to dash cobwebs off these moldy old wrappings they've bundled about life and decency!"

"Yes—but we aren't living a century hence—we're living now—and there's no way to escape that!"

"Oh, this cup of virtue that a woman must bring to a man! And the cup of experience she gets in exchange! But how is it wine in his cup yet dregs in hers? Answer that, Chickie? Is there sex in the soul, if we have one? And the same thing can be sin for her but just a whiff of knowledge for him! Page Peter and ask how come, how come!"

Then Janina took Chickie's hand: "So you don't want to hurt him, ole dear? So you're in love with him, are you?"

Janina had crystallized a thought Chickie would not admit to the edge, even of her brain. She grew white to the lips.

"No, Janina! Not with him—or any man!"

Janina shrugged: "One or the other, Chickie, old dear! Sooner or later!"

Chickie said with a childish viciousness: "Sometimes I wish the whole world was mute! I wish there was no such thing as a tongue!"

The end of that week, a few moments after Chickie came off duty, her name was called raucously through the hall.

A woman waited for her in the reception room.

If Chickie wished before that the world had no tongue, she wished it with a cold fury before this meeting was done.

CHAPTER LII

THE WORD TO JAKE

THE reception room was a gaunt, oblong space with high ceilings and long, narrow bay windows—one of those formidable salon parlors, fashionable a generation ago. It was empty, except for a rug, a weathered oak table, half a dozen chairs and, in the far corner, a piano in highly polished walnut.

Chickie came running down the stairs, expecting to see Mary or, perhaps, her mother. Loud, jazzy music struck blithely into the hall. Three girls in uniform were sitting at the piano singing with noisy exuberance.

In the center of the room, regarding them with a patronizing disdain, was a striking figure in a mannish suit of dark material, gray gloves, gray suède pumps and a small hat of black and silver. This hat fitted close about a clear cut, aggressive face, olive skinned and set—a woman nearing 50, yet whose high shoulders and compact flesh discounted age.

She advanced swiftly as Chickie entered, both nervous and determined: "Is this Miss Bryce? I would like to speak with you. I am Mrs. Burdell. No doubt you have heard of me."

"I don't recall the name, Mrs. Burdell. I don't remember hearing it."

"No? I am Dr. Ramm's aunt—"

Chickie surveyed her with a palpitant unease. She moved a chair for her visitor. Mrs. Burdell raised her hand, glancing to the group in the corner, now crashing out chords and laughter.

"Not here, Miss Bryce. I cannot speak here—the matter is very grave . . ."

"Yes. I am sorry. There is no other place. My roommate is sleeping."

"I have my car at the door."

Chickie remained hesitant.

"Will you give me half an hour of your time, Miss Bryce?

It is to our mutual interest. I really should not care to speak here."

Then Chickie looked at Mrs. Burdell and nodded. She had already a withering intuition of the woman's purpose. She went reluctant, and with a mounting indignant anger to her room.

She put on her hat slowly, half deciding against going. David's aunt? No, she had not heard of such a person. He had sisters—two of them, much older than he. He had never spoken of an aunt. What grave matter was there? How did it concern Mrs. Burdell?

She picked up a small neck piece of marten, set it jauntily across her shoulders; pulled the brim of the flowered blue hat, and looking very summery and colorful, very slim, went down the stairs. Mrs. Burdell's eyes were faintly admiring.

A chauffeur helped them into a stunning, gray limousine. Mrs. Burdell seemed relieved when they were started. She took out a cigarette and lit it, offered the gold case to Chickie. Chickie refused.

Mrs. Burdell took a long, swift puff. "So my nephew has not spoken of me, Miss Bryce? That seems strange. It was I who raised him after his mother's death."

Chickie said: "Did you?" She was surprised for he had often spoken of his mother, yet never as of one long passed.

"Yes—and it was at my wish that he went to Vienna. I realized even then that he had a brilliant future before him. He has already justified the faith of his family. As you are aware, he is making a great name for himself—"

Mrs. Burdell puffed hastily: "And of course nothing must interfere with this—nothing!"

With this she looked at Chickie, whose cheeks were now burning: "Perhaps, Miss Bryce, you understand why I must speak to you?"

"No, Mrs. Burdell, I do not!"

"Then I shall be very frank. In the last six weeks persistent rumors concerning you and David have reached us. There is considerable talk of your past. Many of the friends who know my nephew seem to know a great deal about you. This is very distressing to us. You can certainly understand, Miss Bryce, that such reports can do an irreparable damage to David's prestige. He is a young man. He has to safeguard his name—"

Chickie's pulses were thudding hotly—her throat and her tongue seared. She sat forward, speaking with a husky quiet: "If you have come to learn my designs on Dr. Ramm, Mrs. Burdell, I may assure you that I have none. As to safeguarding his name, he should be the best judge of that."

"The facts prove that he is not a judge of this. Men—especially young men—are never judges in such matters. But you know, of course, that his work claims his only loyalty. He will soon realize that his association with you hampers him here and it will be terminated. So you have nothing to gain. I have come to ask you, in fairness, to end this disastrous relation—"

Her breath rose in choking gusts. She had to clench her hands—hold herself silent.

The other's voice sharpened; her high shoulders became peaked and narrow: "I have a right to ask this, Miss Bryce, and to inform you that if you have any thoughts of marriage, put them from your mind. Even David would not be reckless enough for that!

"Why, the idea! A girl of your character daring to force herself on such men! I wonder what the world is coming to. You should realize, at least, some sense of responsibility. There's entirely too much of this looseness; this moral laxity. You do as you please and then come back and attempt to marry a man of prestige and family and brilliance! Every little flapper in the city will think she can do the same—"

Chickie felt the blood beat warmly in heavy waves about her head—

"Moreover you would never be accepted by his family or his friends!"

She flung in then with a soft violence: "I shall not ask you, Mrs. Burdell, nor any one else to accept me now or at any time. And if the thought of marriage becomes interesting to me, I assure you the man shall know what I am and he and not his relatives shall be the judge!"

"Do I understand, Miss Bryce, that you refuse to accept my suggestion? You intend to persist in dragging the scandal of your life into my nephew's?"

"You may understand, Mrs. Burdell, that I accept no dictation from you. If you have rights in this matter take them up with Dr. Ramm."

"I have come to you deliberately, Miss Bryce, and if my efforts fail, I shall know what is the next step to take. If necessary I shall place the matter of your actions before the heads of the hospital. I shall inform them of your past."

"My past is no secret, Mrs. Burdell. And threats are quite useless against me."

She leaned forward, chugging, red of face, gave an order to the chauffeur. He turned about and drove swiftly toward town. About three blocks from the nurses' home they stopped.

"It is not convenient for me to drive further. As a last word, Miss Bryce—let this be a threat which does not fail. It may interest you to know that I control the bulk of the family fortune—I shall certainly see to its disposal."

Mrs. Burdell glanced swiftly up and down the block. She said sharply: "Hurry!" The machine leaped around the turn, went speeding westward.

As Chickie stepped to the curb a woman passed, so she walked lightly and smiling. Then she came to a small park and sat for a moment on the stone bulwark.

She felt weak, with a curious, warm tingling all along her skin. She walked along, keeping her head high. A bit of stone got under her foot. She sent it flying with a furious little spurt down the hill.

Her fists were doubled and the nails driving cruelly against her palms.

It was 5 o'clock. At this hour David came to the hospital on his visits. It made her hot merely to think of him—to see his lean, vital face in her thoughts.

She wondered suddenly why his aunt was in such a hurry; why she had stopped three blocks from the hospital.

She had promised to meet him—to go for a short drive with him. With a white, flaming anger she hastened her steps now. She would certainly go. She certainly would.

But she turned back and went to the little park and sat a long while on the green bench. She sat there with her hands clasped—looking at the grass—at the light shivering over the blades.

Suddenly out of all the interview one sentence hurled at her: "You come back and try to marry a man of prestige, of family. Then every little flapper in the city will think she may do the same."

She should have been hanged by the neck until dead—or broken on the wheel. Then no one would think it was worth while to take a fling.

She thought this, and laughed—a hard, brittle sound. Then she heard a whistle—5:30—almost a moment later, as it seemed, the Angelus rang out.

Well, he would not wait any longer—he would know she wasn't coming.

She went to her room. Miss Pruett was now on duty. There was a letter from Jake.

She sat down at once and answered it—and for the first time she let the bitterness creep in. And it was the thing Jake seized upon. He took it as a summons.

CHAPTER LIII

THE DISMISSAL

DAVID was coming down the corridor with two of the greatest surgeons in the city. A paper of his was published in the current issue of the Medical Journal, and this was yet triumph enough to give a stir to his heart.

He was much younger than the other two. He had a vividness and youth about him, even holding himself quiet and intent as now. Seeing Chickie, this suppressed glow lighted his eyes. He bowed in a most friendly way.

She was bringing flowers sent to her patient—white roses, perfect and cold. When he bowed in that warm quickness, she trembled almost with a feeling of guilt. What had she to do with him and the brilliant world where he dwelt? Why should he smile at her?

She was pale and moved about in a subdued way. In the night she had gone over many scenes; she had come to an aching and cruel decision—the only one, she was now certain, for her.

Not fear of this Mrs. Burdell who had, with such unmincing candor, pointed out Chickie's place, was responsible, but the stinging of her own fierce, young pride . . . A menace to others, was she? A stain on his reputation?

Why—she didn't need him—nor any one! Stand alone—why!—did the world suppose she would flinch because favor and brightness was denied? Indeed!

But it was not easy to take the goad. For she wanted joy—oh, a flower or two. And she liked it when he met her in the hall with a breezy: "Hello, girl!" or again: "Come here, Miss Nurse—picked up some wicked ones for you!" Most of all was it sweet to sit at concerts with this tall, gallant fellow who would lean down and whisper: "Beautiful—make them play it again—"

She didn't want to give all this up. Why, with Jake gone, he was about the only friend she had.

Why was he her friend? What did he think of her? What would he say, now that it was ended?

She debated this with many wistful regrets. That great kindness of his, coming out to the cottage to tell her about Mrs. Ellis and, of course, she could transfer. She must! Standing there with such a warm, insistent look, yet so humble as though he were nobody much—well—he might have done all that because he was a great friend of Jake's, and Jake told him to look out for her and give her a boost, that smart she was. So, Jake being away, it was the part of a friend to do this.

Or, perhaps he had acted so because of a kindness that was in him—sorry for any one who was down. He was that way—sorry for her because she was turned out and her hope cheated . . .

That same bigness made him put his arms about her when they sat at the beach and she seemed so forlorn, thinking her lonely thoughts. How clean and strong he was then, like the waves in the sun or like a happy morning—

She mustn't think these things. She had given up the right to dreams; to the infinite sweet glow of young-girl fancies. All lost to her.

Why, if she were to be happy—then other girls, very young, would shrug and think they, too, might flout the law and escape.

After a day and a night, this charge of her accuser's scorched most hotly in her brain. As though she had not paid! As though any girl with open eyes would look at her and follow on that path along the river road!

Why, she had served her term like any convict. If a man forges and is sent to prison for years and these years pass, may he not return to life? May he not laugh or even kiss his wife or hold his child? But another man seeing this may think: "Ho, that fellow stole—look at him now—he is glad! I, too, shall steal!" What then? Why, let all offenders be sent to the gallows or swept into the sea—and the cringers on the shore may see the doom and play safe!

These thoughts went through her with a rising bitterness. She had not escaped. If it were only that moment when she saw Barry Dunne and Ila Moore sitting together—and she, too scarlet to look in David's face; to answer when he spoke—that moment would have paid.

And if it were only this moment now when she must say to this man who seemed so very fine to her; say to him that she wished to go her way alone. She didn't need friends or notice or warmth or gayety—not at all.

This was the note she wrote to him telling that she could not go to another concert:

"Dear Doctor David—I hope you will not think me turned suddenly temperamental and prima donna like because I take my pen in hand to indite this cancellation of all dates. But you know I can't go to the concert to-morrow night. Well I don't think I am going to make any excuses, for I trust you to believe that I have a good reason for writing this. You know the great joy these evenings have been to me. I half think you've kept on asking me just because I was so always thrilled about them. You have been very glorious to me, going out of your way as you did about the transfer. I would like to have the power and the way to do such noble things myself. So this is to tell you that one Helena Bryce is most grateful and most honored.

"But being it's all the same to you, my very dear friend, I've decided, for many reasons, that in the future I must attend more to my work and to that alone. It is a better thing for me to do."

She wrote this on heavy, pale gray paper, long single sheets with rough edges. She wrote in a clear, strong hand. She sent the letter special delivery so that he would get it only in the afternoon and there would be no chance to argue about it.

It came to him a little before 4. He thrust it into his pocket, not recognizing the writing. Half an hour later he was alone in his office and opened it.

Twice he read it before its import struck him. Then he repeated to himself, "A better thing to do," and he saw her face in its white delicacy as she had raised it to him, saw her eyes, so deep and beautiful, suddenly filled with tears.

Now, who was making the road harder for her? What had happened that she couldn't go to a concert? And that from now on she must push away all pleasure—young, bright thing like her?

At first he became impatient and was half inclined to ignore

this refusal. Then he remembered the last concert and the look of indignation Ila Moore had turned on Chickie. Oh—was that the reason? And she was afraid of meeting people who once had known her?

No—something deeper than this. For she was brave. He had seen this.

Well—they would go to the concert, of course.

But he stood with the letter in his hand and read again its final sentence: "A better thing for me to do—"

What a tragic and pathetic renouncing! Did she mean that she was dooming herself—that she was cutting loose from all happiness?

He saw her then as she had sat forward in the car that night they rode to the hill tops and she said: "We ought to be brave anyway to take the consequences we have courted; we should be glad even to suffer if this is what we need to make us strong!"

This was her creed . . . and she was going to live up to it—eliminate even friendship—

Friendship—he said the word and smiled. He said the word and remembered Helena's mouth so sweet, so chastely cut; remembered the beautiful line of her throat—

Oh, what ridiculous nonsense—couldn't go to a concert.

He stuck the letter in his pocket—got his hat. This was her day off—she was at home.

He would go out and see about this. It takes two to make a date—and two this time to break it.

CHAPTER LIV

CHICKIE'S STAND

WHAT made her do this now? Rather high-handed in a way since she knew very well he liked her company and wanted it.

It never occurred to David Ramm that Chickie acted to safeguard him. He saw in her letter a grim, yet pitiful sentence of exile passed on herself. He wondered why she did this; why it was now become necessary and a better thing to do—

He was far from agreeing. Maudlin way to look at things, especially in one so capable of gladness. She was not the narrow, righteous type taking punishment as a godly due. She didn't view herself so. He was sure of it. She was game—yes—but never smug—never cringing—

So something had happened . . . some revelation, perhaps, like that other time. He drove more quickly, wondering what it could be; if it was any one connected with the hospital; if she was afraid of her position there—

Would she tell him? Or would she hide behind that reserve of hers—that reserve that had piqued him so in the beginning.

He remembered the day she stood at the corner with the dog—a figure of grace. He asked her to go to a theater and she said coolly she never went out. She had that rule. As she told him this, she stooped to fasten the dog's collar and her sweet mouth was very pale.

How remarkable this refusal of hers had seemed . . . how very unusual such an attitude in a young, pretty nurse. He was pricked by the calm indifference with which she turned him down . . . pricked yet fascinated. For he thought her very beautiful and imagined some mysterious, profound cause for her aloofness.

When finally she did go driving with him and he surprised her in moods of quiet, even of sorrow, his interest and his curiosity grew.

Then that morning came when she was gone; her place taken. For a while he was completely unable to accept the story he heard.

His memory dwelt on the appealing sadness he had so often noted in her eyes, and immediately he decided in her favor. If she had really done all this, some moving cause lay behind it. It could be no shabby or trifling affair. He was sure of this. What a cruel shame then to send her away branded!

All the fight that was in him and all the pity surged uppermost. He had seen much that was fine and mellow in her; noted often her eagerness about the wards; the humanness of her serving; the way she had with the children. And he had heard her talk; heard her laugh; learned something of her thoughts. So he could take no part in this ruthless judgment passed against her.

When he saw her in the sun room, forcing herself with a pathetic pride to meet his glance and saying: "It is already done, Dr. David, I have left," he wanted to strike out and hit. Blame some one or something. Not her. Behind these facts just bared were reasons deep and terrible and cruel as life itself. She was defenseless before them.

Or so he judged her. And her punishment seemed brutal. Especially having to take that letter to a stranger and show it. He knew somewhat of its contents—somewhat of that paragraph. He doubted greatly her courage to go through with it.

When she met the test, when he saw her standing hesitant on the corner and then going resolutely into the building, a warmth of admiration stirred him. Bitter enough to do a thing like that! Not many would. Worth a cheer when one fights so.

A bond warmer and more vital than sympathy made him put his arms about her. Deserved to win—any one so game. And she would. He stood by and watched, not knowing that through serving her he was loving her.

He thought less of her past. Some day he would learn it all. Right now it was pleasant enough riding with her; winning the open, fervent tribute in her eyes. She was odd in that—so frankly admiring—

That he might be hurt by this association never occurred to him; nor had he figured on the people who might know of her and talk of her—

This letter flinging it in his face seemed inopportune—unnecessary. He would soon dismiss it—

Jennie opened the door. She was always a trifle excited by these visits of the great young doctor—as she and Jonathan called him. And now she blushed: "Oh, Chickie? Why —she's in the garden—"

"Then let me go in that way—please. No, don't call her!" He had a domineering way of speaking.

Jennie said, hesitant: "You can come through the kitchen, if you like, or through the alley."

He smiled: "Through the alley, Miss Jennie—"

Chickie was sitting on a bench outside the summer house. It was September, but the crimson roses were still all brilliant with their flowers. A book lay open in Chickie's lap.

Her hands were clasped on it, her head leaning back against the roses, eyes closed.

He walked softly and she didn't stir. Then he stood at her side—saw tears on her lashes—

She said softly: "Jonathan—chocolates, please!"

"David, girl—and no chocolates!"

Color whipped into her cheeks: "Oh—why have you come?"

"To see you—to take you to a concert—"

"No—why didn't you get my note?"

"Oh, that for your note!"

She covered the pages of the book with her hands and for moments didn't speak.

He watched the red fading in her face and smiled: "Were you crying, lady?"

"No—"

"Yes, you were! Is that the way you are—crying over a book? What is it—"

She held to it—"Oh, nothing much. I just happened to pick it from Miss Pruett's table. I only took it to read in the car."

"What kind of books does Miss Pruett read? And what manner of book does Miss Bryce weep upon?" He took it from her reluctant hands. It was that fantastic story of Hergesheimer's "The Lay Anthony"—story of love so flame-like in its purity that even death is powerless against it. Its spirit wings like a song across the fields of muteness and the two who uttered it are one in its immortal harmony.

She would not have had him take the book—would not

have had him see her tears for worlds. She laughed: "Here—give it back—"

"You're finished—it's open at the last page—you can have it to-morrow." He put it in his pocket. "Now listen—why did you send me that letter? Isn't it rather belated?"

"Yes—it is belated—I should have made this decision some time ago." She didn't look at him.

"Why make it at all? We did quite nicely without any decision, it seems to me. Go get your things. We'll go to dinner first."

She shook her head. He was standing above her with his arms folded. A musing, puzzled look came into his eyes.

"What makes you think you have the sole right in the matter?"

She shut her eyes swiftly. But after a second rubbed the grass with her toe and smiled: "Well, you see, Mr. Doctor, I'm not sure that it's very wise for a brilliant youth such as yourself to be hobnobbing so with a mere nurse. Don't you know a great many people are opposed to such?"

He grew serious—his jaw clinched: "Is it on my account then? How enormously considerate you are."

She laughed: "Oh, my, yes—just a way of mine. I look backwards and forwards and cogitate this way and that. Then I decide—immutable like. What's did is done and no undoing of it."

He sat down on the bench and looked at her: "What happened, Helena?"

Her lips trembled: "No—nothing. I'm telling you the truth. I just decided it is much better for me to only work. You know I haven't much longer. The course is only two years and four months here—so—"

"Why do you evade? Do you mean to tell me that a mere concert interferes with your work? Haven't you enjoyed coming with me? Why must you stop now?"

When she remained silent, he reached over and took her hand: "Was it because of last time? You were disturbed?"

She gave him a swift glance of appeal: "Oh, no—not that. But just that I don't want to go now. I see things differently—"

"Well—I don't. I see them as I did before. Did anything happen at the hospital?"

"No—"

"Who said anything then? What made you all of a sudden see the light?"

"Nothing and no one—oh, really—just my own eyes—"

"Then we'll go for a ride. That'll be all right, won't it—"

She bit her lips. He repeated: "We can do that."

"No—"

"Then it's I you're against, is it? I'm the thing to be eliminated and not the concert? Is that it?"

No forcing of her will would bring forth such a confirmation. She said only: "I have to do this—oh, really. I have to."

CHAPTER LV

TWO MEN

She looked at his hand holding hers; its pressure touched her heart.

He saw by the pallor of her face that she was overwrought; that she was not going to speak, yet he said: "You have not told me the truth, Helena. Has any fault been found with your work at the hospital?"

"No—none—"

"Something has happened, though. Are you going to force me to believe in your good reasons without telling them?"

She set a flickering smile against his warm, insistent look: "Yes—well, you see, my dear friend David, you have done so much for me already—perhaps you don't know how much. So you do this, too. Can't you? It is the greatest kindness you can do to me—it really is—"

She sat with her hands clasped in that attitude of sad, gentle acquiescence that had once so stirred the hot, impetuous youth of one man; the warm, exultant passions of another and was now waking to flame the spirit of David Ramm.

He kept hold of her hands—he kept looking at her face as though there dwelt here before him in pallid gold and white the spirit of beauty. That image of her profile, palely cut, went into his mind like an etching.

It was before him that night when he read the book and learned or thought he learned why she cried. She was once the girl Eliza with the transparent and beautiful dream of a love ineffably pure and enduring. And she cried because her dream was lost; so pitifully and irrevocably lost.

He could see her closed eyes with the tears on her lashes. In this new light he wondered about her and about the man she had loved. It occurred to him sharply that she might still love this man. Perhaps this was the reason she wept, and this was the reason she asked for solitude.

The thought made him vaguely impatient . . . and he wondered where the man might be; what sort he was, forsaking

her so. For it came to him now with a certainty that Chickie had given to this other in trust—so the man was bound in any kind of honor to marry her—

A moment later he dismissed this idea—killing to be doomed to a marriage of this kind—far better to be deserted if the love had not endured—

So she was not regretting the man, but the lost ideals. This explained the poignant sadness often on her mouth. Watching her now, he read into all her expressions this wistful regret.

But it did not explain the sudden and drastic decision she made. And kept. She was determined about it and would not even ride with him.

He said to her: "You're a foolish little thing! Oh, you're a silly little fanatic—aren't you?"

She thought by this that he was making very light of it and she was oddly dismayed.

"How long is the exile to last?"

She said with a studied flippance: "Oh, this, you know, is the day of indeterminate sentences. So I can't just tell—"

"But when a man is sentenced he always knows for why. When am I to be told the nature of my offense?"

She colored so painfully that he did not insist. He would wait his time. He would learn—well, all he wanted to know about her—

In a manner, commonplace enough, yet remarkable, the facts he sought were given him. He was called to Stockton on a consultation. And it happened that the afternoon he was leaving he met Chickie at the hospital and told her of this.

The simple announcement came with the force of a blow. She was instantly confused and stammered: "Oh—yes—are you? Will you be gone long?"

"Three or four days, perhaps. I've arranged to look over some research of a classmate of mine. He's done some good work."

She said faintly: "That must be Dr. Robert Emerson, isn't it?"

"Yes—do you know him?"

She nodded, feeling that hands pressed her bowing to the earth. Why did she say that! Why had she spoken! But she went on: "Yes—I know Dr. Emerson quite well—"

"You do? Well—he's a good fellow. Now, good-by, Miss!" His eyes were very winning: "I hope you miss me. There's a

concert the night I return or something, and listen, you mere nurse! I'm taking you. You've had your way—we'll see about mine. . . ."

She scarcely heard—for there was a ringing and a fog in her brain.

He would say to Dr. Emerson: "Oh, by the way—you know Helena Bryce—nurse—"

And Dr. Emerson would be astounded. He would talk of her. Then David would hear it all . . . even of the inquest and of all the charges that were brought—

Hours and hours after he left her thoughts pressed upon her, warm and faint. They frightened her. Why should she care if he learned it all? Didn't she want this? Didn't she wish to be left alone? Hadn't she deliberately sought to eliminate him?

Of course—

Yet a thousand times she saw Dr. Emerson's large, intelligent face—then David's so sallow and strongly cut, yet with its vital and winning eyes.

He would be repulsed learning all this of her. He would wish never to look at her again—

She dreaded the thought of his return; and dreaded again the thought of his remaining there.

But she said to herself: "He knows already—of course, he does! Why does he suppose I had to leave!"

This didn't reassure her. For it would be different when he learned all the details and how she had sneaked off to a ranch house and worn a wedding ring and pretended to be married and lied so much and then at last running away and carrying the child dead to the doctor—

Oh—he might even wonder about that and just how the child had died. Others did—

What if he did?

But if he should come and ask her about it? If he should do that?

She would never speak. She would turn from him—let him think anything he wished. An overpowering melancholy stole upon her.

She had a feeling that the world was now swept entirely clean, even of friendships—as far as she was concerned. She said to herself and smiled ironically: "I should have a mission in the world—I should think of others—"

She wrote this in a breezy strain to Jake, bringing in, as she was accustomed to do, all her experiences in the hospital. She said she had decided to open a foundling asylum—

"For you know, Jake, getting born is really the start of all the trouble in the world. And we ought to begin at the start. Now I will tell you of a sad case because it will make you happy to hear of this, and besides hospitals are full of such cases. Well, two babies were born here in this last week. One had a birthmark all over its cheek and if I were the mother I'd just have thanked all the sweet angels in heaven when it died. But its mother wasn't that kind. She is crying all day about it. And being as I am a tender, charitable soul I bethought me of a way to ease her grief. It was most otherwise, my solution. For you must also know that there was this other baby, and I'm not quite sure about the mother, except that she doesn't like the child and didn't want it and makes it live on a bottle, which isn't the proper caper. Anyway, the father has only come twice and then he said to me: 'Never mind about the baby—I'll see it later—' He hasn't looked at it, and the mother is always asking me about having children adopted. So you see—do you?

"Well—I thought it would be quite coquettish to give this baby to the mother who wants hers so much. And I said to the girl who won't nurse hers: 'Suppose I take little Anna into another patient of mine and let her stay there a while because her baby died and she's broken-hearted.'

"The mother said: 'Sure, kiddo! Go as far as you like—' I felt very glib, as you may imagine, and went into the room, just pretending to be passing. The mother whose baby died almost jumped out of the bed. She yelled: 'Take it out of here! Take it out!'

"And that's what a dear, kind heart the world has! And all trouble begins when we're born.

"But really, Jake, isn't it frightful to make a criminal of a baby right from the start? That's what we do—we call it a criminal because it got born. In my asylum that will not be! No, indeed. Now what do you think of my idea? For I may ask you for seven dollars to lay the corner stone. Will you give it, kind sir?"

Jake wrote back to her—the longest letter he had ever written. In it was this paragraph . . . "What is the matter with you and what all has happened, Helena dear? I cannot

let you grow so sad. For you are, and I read it between the lines of all your letters. What are you keeping from your old friend, Jake? Don't do that, Helena. And as for your foundling asylum—start it whenever you like, since I'm to be the papa of it. Go to it. I'm coming back, Helena, my darling, to help you in this or in anything you want—so you give your hand and your golden heart to me— I'll be home and having you this day week—so that's that and never say me nay!"

CHAPTER LVI

THE GREAT CALL

It happened even as Chickie feared.

David was passing with Dr. Emerson down the main street of Moppett. Before the drug store were three or four wooden chairs, occupied by the portly and the politically inclined. A burly fellow, with a great bull neck and a slouch hat pulled slantwise, accosted them with a menacing glance from large, slothful eyes.

Emerson said: "Hello, Larry."

The other mumbled some inarticulate answer and spat out a great wad of tobacco, just grazing their feet and making both of them step quickly.

David growled: "Hell of a way your friends greet you!"

Emerson laughed: "Small town for you. That's Mitford. Used to be coroner; lost out in the last election and blames me."

"How so?"

"Got himself in wrong on a girl case some years ago. The town went against him. He tried to get me for signing the baby's death certificate. He's been down and out ever since."

David repeated carelessly: "Girl case?" He recalled at once the rumors he had heard and Chickie's confused admission: "I know Dr. Emerson. Yes! Quite well—" He waited with an abnormal anxiety for the details.

"Yes, the baby died. No question about it. I attended the girl. It was a very unusual case."

Again David repeated: "Unusual? Aren't they all alike?"

"Not this one. By the way, the girl came from San Francisco. Well connected down there. Munson knew her and sent a lawyer to defend her . . ."

David said laboriously: "Helena Bryce?"

"You know of it?"

He nodded heavily: "Yes—somewhat. She's in training at the hospital."

"You don't tell me! Went back and faced it, did she? She

had the goods. I knew it. A damn shame—the whole thing was."

"You attended her—did you see much of her?"

"Well—she was around here five or six months, I believe. Had every one buffaloed. I never gave the question of her marriage a second thought. She seemed very quiet and superior."

David interrupted harshly: "That's possible, isn't it? What was the mixup over the death? Why the inquest—months later?"

Then Emerson told him and thinking that David knew far more than he did sketched a heartening picture of that blustery day in January when Chickie came with the dead child in her arms, the dog following her. How white and beaten she was; how she cried out when he said the child was gone; how she gave money for the burial, even for a stone above the grave.

Dr. Emerson said: "I've never forgotten it. She was quite a beautiful girl. Her mother was dying. It was a pitiful affair all the way through—"

David turned his head: "Did the man show up? Did any one know of him?"

"She wouldn't tell. They couldn't cuff or threaten it out of her. Wonderful the way she stuck it out. I heard afterwards—I believe it was old Nicky told me, that it was some young lawyer—they were engaged; had been going around years. Some trouble or quarrel came up and he dashed off to New York and got married. I believe the second girl was wealthy—"

"Didn't other people know? Didn't they stand by her?"

"They didn't know. No one knew until Mitford sent down and had her brought back here with the sheriff months after the whole thing was over. . . ."

David doubled his fists. So this was Helena's story—

He sat in a room of Dr. Emerson's home that night and reviewed it. He scratched up pad after pad of Emerson's prescription blanks—then he stood at the window and smoked.

The blue hills that rim the San Joaquin were now massy and black against a copper-streaked sky. Chickie's face, with soft, fair hair done low at her neck, and her slim, delicate, white hands were before him. He kept seeing her eyes, so deep and beautiful, as she turned suddenly, in a way she had, and asked: "What now, Dr. David!"

He became bitterly uncomfortable—tossed away a cigarette, then another. He was conscious of a maddening desire to rush down to the city and look at her—learn if her face was the same as when he left—if she might smile.

The picture Emerson had drawn of her running along in the wind, carrying the child, laying it dead on the table, grew vivid as though he had seen it. Or as though it were but yesterday the tragedy had happened and he should hurry to her, offer comfort—

In the back of his mind a voice said to him: "I love her—" It caught him with a still shock— He would not hear it. But he became feverish with his unrest; with his eagerness to return—speak to her—see her—

He decided finally to read—and forced the concentration that rarely failed him. After an hour he grew impatient; after two hours he tossed the book aside—

So they were engaged and were to have been married; then the fellow ditched her—the damn skunk—

The violence of his contempt tempered immediately. Good thing he did—much better—

Suddenly he remembered the letter Chickie had written terminating their friendship; canceling all her dates and that pathetic doom she had pronounced on herself: "From now on I must give myself to the work and to that alone. It is a better thing for me to do—"

From now on! All her life she must go alone! Well—must she!

And there was again this judgment: "We should be brave—oh, anyway, to take the consequences we ourselves have courted. We should be glad to suffer if this is what we need to make us strong—David—you believe this—you do?"

It ran along his nerves now in a piercing way. She had sat forward in the car, her face uplifted, the beauty of the night no holier than her look.

He would leave in the morning. He would leave early. He would go at once and see her. He would put his arms about her.

Again the voice in his mind whispered: "You love her—you love her—"

What if he did! What about it? He sat with his arms folded on the book. Suppose he did love her? His affair—nobody else's.

Faces took shape and filed before him. He viewed them with a chill irony—faces of women and girls he knew—lifted brows—curled lips—things that would be said—

And why? Because of this pitiful affair that had come into her life? Because of this, she was not to be loved?

Then he summoned Chickie's form and her face into this group—he contrasted her with these others.

There was Marsha Newlands. Marsha was a good sort—handsome in a way. She dabbled idly in art and cocktails. At every dinner she had some potent new mixture to offer. She could outdrink any two men.

But Marsha had money; she talked with a posy brilliance of communism and fraternity. She was a friend of eminently respectable people. His sister thought highly of Marsha—she had social prestige. That would be a nice marriage for David. It had been urged upon his attention.

There was Gladys Ross—a demure little vampire who wore her coal black hair bobbed with thin curlicues pasted to her cheek-bones. Well it was fun to pass an hour with Gladys—more than an hour was utter boredom. Her tongue rattled along, echoing, repeating. If Gladys had ever thought a thought—ever experienced an honest emotion, it left no trace on mind or heart—

There was Dulcie Hartwick—step-daughter and protégé of Emily Burdell—a distant aunt of his. Dulcie was a sweet little flapper with a cool million in her own right. She rather adored him—and blushed and used to say: "David, I think you're just too awful—you swear so!" And she expected him to roar at that. Whenever he called on his aunt—rarely enough, Dulcie took a rose and made him stoop down while she put it in his buttonhole. She would purse her lips and say: "There, now, ain't that sweet?" Because he knew she wanted him to kiss her—he never did—he thought her quite ridiculous . . .

But Emily lauded her to the skies. Think of that fortune. What does a brilliant man want with an intellectual wife?

It would be a wonderful marriage. He would establish himself securely in society. The eyes of the world would smile upon it.

And when the door of his own home closed? Well—such a trifle to consider!

Then Chickie stood in line with these others. He saw her

sitting in the garden of the little cottage, saw the mighty Jonathan—the blushing and uncertain mother—

But he saw Chickie's face—and her eyes. He heard her voice—

Does a man love in order to please the world—to have them approve his choice?

Does he marry to win his own happiness; to meet his own mate?

Get up early in the morning and race down. . . . Chickie's face remained—all the others faded.

CHAPTER LVII

JAKE'S HOMECOMING

SHE couldn't understand the almost despairing sadness that settled upon her; loneliness piercing as the sense of loss.

She walked around the block one night before going on duty. The bay was dark with shadows crowding down like armies from the hills. Then a boat made a shimmery path through the water. She watched it; the thought of a lifelong aloneness became real like a sentient thing in her mind.

She had regarded this many times but never before felt its breath in her mouth. She had spoken of it often to her thought but never with a lucid and inner conviction that such was indeed her fate. Deep in her heart, for all its blasting experience, had dwelt her young, glowing faith in life and its beauty. And its love.

It was this she was now renouncing. She had gone a wavering road, refusing to take the hard, grim path. Now the moments of indecision and of temporizing were past. She knew it.

Jake's letter did much to force this feeling. She was glad, in a way, that he would soon be home again. His presence gave a richness and a color to her days. Magnificent fellow, hunching his shoulder to laugh in her ears. He had done much to lighten memories; much to keep the heart in her from failing.

She thought of this and of all he had given to her. Her thoughts blessed him warmly.

Yet now he wanted a reckoning. He said they must have this. So, after all, as one has said—life takes its price for what life gives us. In all, in every little even as in bigger things.

As the days passed and it came nearer to the time when he would arrive, she was stopped often in her work by the flashing of his image—the black eyes summoning her with an imperious: "Come, now—do you marry the man or no?"

She couldn't imagine severing the ties between herself and

Jake. From the night she first met him and he whispered, with a humming exuberance, "Now for fun and frolic!" she had been vividly stimulated; proud of his notice. Yet there had been always a sense of freedom, a jaunty irresponsibility. No one must take seriously Jake's warmest look; no one must think beyond the glow of the living and present hour. That only had being for him.

He would speak of love—none more dreamily, none more hotly and none more lightly. He would not bother one with talk of marriage and futures and problems. So there had been sparkling dinners and joyous hours at dinner and opera.

Being so young she had delighted in this. Because Jake was Jake and because he was years older than herself—some fifteen or sixteen—she had felt impudently safe. Oh—he liked her—of course; liked the pretty, eager youth of her and her princess airs and her flippant, conceited indifference. But he would never dream of marriage.

That was not to his mold—nor could be.

Even when he had come so nobly in the end she had taken it as she took the greatness of Jonathan. Men—big fellows—do such things.

She thought he would continue like this as long as could be—

But now that Jake was gone and another in his place. No more dallying. Did she want him or not? Out with it—

The fear of his persistence weighed on her enormously. Oh, he would come laughing and seek to carry her out of the life she had chosen and into his own. Its pleasures would become her pleasures—a heated, radiant life.

And all this contact with the big, raw, vital things; the striving and suffering; the aching and hoping, would be lost. Of course. For they would go to the petaled ways of flowers and of perfume. Never mind what lies beneath.

As he said to her once: "The wine of life has sparkled—drink the wine and leave the dregs."

Some may do this. She was one who couldn't. For Life had forced the full of the cup even to the last drop on her.

She was finished with it. For her, at least, it was proven better to give than to take. She wanted now to do this—wanted to be like the selfless, heroic ones stooping to help another along.

Oh—that was a finer way! Thinking these things, she found

the face of David before her—and blushed. Why should she think of him? His way was more various by far than even her way and Jake's.

Yet David embodied an ideal for her. Something splendid and upstanding like that line from the Transcript: "Great Hercules, who stood with life upon his hand outstretched for any man to take!" Glorious to give so unthinkingly; to come in the middle of the night serving others. He did that many times. And she loved to see his face, thin and finely drawn with fatigue. It was then she fancied that deep light of the spirit in his winning eyes. It was then that she longed to stand at his side, asking that she might work and work with him.

Sunday there came a wire from Jake: "Gained two days, Helena, dear; be with you Tuesday, around five; dinner together; how's that? I've much to tell you—all of it good; have a warm ear ready. Jake."

Tuesday—that soon? But he would not ask an answer then—they would have a few days.

Tuesday—much would be faced by then! David would be back—he would give her a cold look and walk on.

She tried to put these thoughts away with a mocking scorn of herself. Why think of him or his looks? What were they to her?

But she kept seeing his face as he said boyishly, "Well, good-by, Miss. There's a concert the night I return. You mere nurse, you, we go!" He gave her hand a quick squeeze and laughed. He had even, white teeth. When he laughed they made his whole expression light, and very vivid.

He would probably be home early Monday morning.

But Monday she didn't see him—nor Monday night, nor then Tuesday. Well—he had come. He was avoiding her.

All morning she was on fire with a feverish uneasiness. She wished that she had to be on duty early in the evening. Then she would put Jake off. She dreaded hurting him . . . recoiled against a cold dismissal, for he was very dear to her.

Yet the thought of marriage was utterly hostile to all her inclinations.

By noontime she could no longer endure her own company and went downtown to have lunch with Janina.

Janina gave her all the news. Chickie kept saying: "What did you say—" and, "Oh, what was that!" until Janina drawled,

"So—so and again so! How may dear angel David be? White and shiny?"

"Aren't you intuitive, Janina! So penetrating! A patient of mine died last night when I was on duty. A nice, sweet young boy— He fought terribly against it. It's got my goat—please don't wish men or love on me!"

"Why blame me, dear child, for the doings of life? Chickie and love—synonyms!"

Chickie put on a bored, sophisticated smile. "Janina and tact—antonyms! Well—how's Bess? Have you seen her lately?"

"Yes—she's had a relapse of intellectualism. She's having readings of the Beowulf and other early English poetry. The bonton attends."

"Oh—they do—" Janina imagined that Chickie was interested in Barry Dunne and Ila Moore and she took indirect ways of informing her of their doings.

"Yes—and believe me, girl, the man doesn't live who can endure a brilliant woman for a steady diet. Unless she's brilliant enough, as I am, to conceal her brilliance. Otherwise, he's bored to extinction—there's something thin and piping in all their relations. I notice it. That's the way it's turning out with them, Chickie, if you happen to be interested in the great problems of men and marriage."

Chickie didn't answer. The night Ila Moore stared at her there had leaped within her a flaming wish. It was this: "Ho—you look down on me? Some day you won't!" She dreamed childishly of doing some supreme, magnificent deed, and this woman and all the world would blush that they had ever scorned her.

She wanted this triumph over them. But she did not wonder or care about Ila Moore's intimate life.

Janina was too hotly individual to understand this. She went on: "Yes—a woman of her type really lives in a second-hand way. She takes out her emotions through her mind and her anemic poetry. Men get sick and tired of that. Good enough for them!

"Bess says they're almost formal with each other. But he's mad about the kid. I'd love to see his mind, Chickie. I bet I could tell you a few of its recantings."

"Please don't! She can have those, too—you don't quite

know how completely. Sometimes I feel as though I were an entirely different person—"

"Physiological enough—new nails grow—new hair grows—new cells—why can't we be re-created without passing beyond the border? Love, baby dear, is a great fellow to make us new again—"

"I have to do some shopping, Janina—"

But Chickie went back to the hospital. There was a hastily scrawled note: "Helena, I want to see you very much. I've just driven down from Moppett. Coming back around five. Be around, won't you? It's very special. David."

That swelled her breast to bursting. Very special—why—what about—

But Jake would come—she would be gone with him. Indeed, she would! She didn't want to know that very special thing David had to say.

Five o'clock and Jake didn't come—then six and he hadn't phoned, and David, if he came to the hospital, had not bothered to look her up.

It was seven, then eight. She became alarmed—he would have wired—why didn't he wire—

She decided to rest a few hours, for she went on duty at midnight. At ten o'clock she was called to the hospital. She saw David. His face was ashen. He led her down the hall. Without any introduction he said: "Were you expecting Jake?"

"Yes."

He took her hand. "I've just come from him."

Her thought chilled, for his lips were a dead white. "He's been hurt, Helena. Jake has been hurt. Automobile collision. He wants you."

She wound her fingers on his hand and he said: "Now, don't get alarmed. We're bringing him here—"

She half smiled, then her heart leaped up in a sharp low cry of appeal: "Not badly hurt? Oh, no—David—not badly hurt—"

He looked at her an instant, still holding her hand: "Not sure—I can't say—be ready—"

She went in a little, staggering run down the hospital steps and to her room. She got into her uniform. She dropped on her knees at the bed. She covered her face and prayed.

CHAPTER LVIII

THE OPERATION

They brought Jake to the hospital. The magnificent form lay still; the black, flashing eyes closed.

As they put him on the bed, Chickie heard in a faint call: "Helena—Helena—"

Pain made her mute with its memories. That time he came in his greatness to stand at her side; the kingly way he stooped to kiss her hands.

She closed her fingers over his, whispered: "I'm here. Don't you know me, Jake?"

The shadow of a smile: "Stay, Helena—"

David was in the room and another nurse. They were dim forms, shadowy and unreal. The whole scene unreal, and like a strange dream that Jake should lie so inert, the joyous lips white and straightened.

He began to mumble: "A jolt—God, what a jolt—coming to you—"

She patted his hand, whispering with her lips near his ear: "I know—rest, Jake. Rest, till the morning."

Coming to her, and now they would have been sitting in the car, looking at waters or stars or at the silent hills. He would be laughing and pleading in a rich gallant way that she should look on him sweetly and love him and, oh, take the man! Why not?

Yet here he lay, the handsome, wooing face so quiet, so bloodless and the lids of his eyes quivering.

He was mortally hurt. His car had turned over, pinning him under the wheel. Not ten minutes from the end of his journey it happened. Ten minutes more and he would have swept off his hat, hunched his shoulder in that cozy, intimate way of his, to say: "Do we dine together, Helena, my darling?"

He was coming out Van Ness when another machine, careening wildly, crashed against him. The driver plunged headlong to his death. In the impact, Jake's car overturned, prisoning him in the wreck.

His chest was crushed and ribs broken. This much David told her. For the rest, they must wait. Watch and wait.

She caught David's arm then: "Wait? What for?"

"I don't know—"

"Oh—but you hope—nothing else?"

"Always hope—"

And he sent her in to sit with Jake, but she was not to be the nurse on the case. She was to be the one who would watch; the one who would wait . . .

And for hours she did this, staring at his dulled and pallid cheeks, holding his hand; praying that his eyes would open. Now and then he said: "Helena—"

"Yes—I have your hand, Jake."

"You can—"

She fancied a trace of the smiling exuberance and he seemed contented. But once he lay unstirring so long and his color seemed so leaden and heavy, she was frightened. She drew her hand free, followed David into the hall, saying: "He's paler."

"Not more so . . ."

"What are you going to do?"

"All that can be done—everything . . ."

"When—why are you waiting?"

Without knowing it, she was clinging to his arm. He took her hand gently: "To make certain."

"David, is Jake dying?" She closed her eyes saying this, and wished not to hear the answer.

David said: "How can I know? There may be internal injuries. Go back now, Helena. In the morning, sleep. I'll be here again in a few hours."

As Chickie turned, she noticed a form leaning against the wall . . . a figure in a black cape with a high collar of fur. And she would have passed without remarking the strangeness of this for the whole night and all its incidents had the starkness and the terror of scenes in a dream.

Even when the figure spoke to her and she knew it was Janina she was not surprised. Janina was white and moveless as a statue. She said: "Chickie—he is living?"

"Jake—why, of course. Why are you here, Janina?"

"We just heard—the crowd of us. Is he going to live . . ."

"Of course—oh, I think so."

"Is he conscious?"

"Yes."

"And suffering?"

"Not greatly."

Janina leaned against the wall, pressing her hands together. "He won't be crippled. Chickie—"

"No—no—"

Janina turned without another word and walked down the corridor. Something about her quiet, her marble whiteness unnerved Chickie.

She went with a swiftness and a fear in her heart back to her post. She held Jake's hand.

He said: "Who's here?"

"I, Jake—Helena—"

"Who else?"

"No one now—no one else—"

His lips parted—then he looked at her and smiled: "Kiss me, Helena—"

Tears rushed to her eyes. She stooped down and softly pressed her lips to his.

He said: "I feel better. I'll be all right—"

"You will—" She imagined the color creeping back to his skin; imagined a softening of the drawn lines at his mouth. She thought: "He is better—of course—"

And he would be up soon and humming again and walking into restaurants with a swing of his lordly shoulders—an exultance in his eyes because of the swift, admiring glances—as it came morning and the sun was bright in the room, Chickie thought this.

He was awake. But he didn't stir.

Then David came. And other doctors—the best in the city. More watching—more waiting.

Late that afternoon David decided. He would operate. Jake was bleeding from internal injuries.

He told Jake he would have to take a few stitches. Jake merely nodded: "In your hands, Dave—" But suddenly he became uneasy—finally he said: "I'm a done dog, am I?"

"You are not—"

A faint smile hovered on Jake's lips—"A will—how about that?"

"Haven't you that? Haven't you made a will?"

"Want to change it. Seven dollars for Helena—do I need to make one?"

"All right—if you wish—I'll have Barrows come out—"

Chickie sat motionless at his side then. Presently she stooped down and whispered: "No—dear Jake—don't do that—"

His weak clasp tightened on her hands: "I'll be all right, Helena. Dave will fix me. I feel all right—"

She was afraid to ask David his fears; afraid to ask him his hopes. He was young. Jake was his friend as well as hers—he would work with all his magnetic energy; he would refuse to acknowledge death as long as one spark of life remained. She knew this.

She said: "Oh, I'm to help—oh, I must help—"

"Yes—"

"But with you—with you, in there—"

He shook his head. "No—you can't do that—too much—"

Jake made his will. He wouldn't let Chickie know what it might be, but he made her stoop down when he said: "I'm to be the papa of it, you know."

When they had him ready for the table he held to Chickie's hand. He said: "For luck, Helena dear—give me one for luck."

And it made no difference to her that the nurse was waiting—no difference who might see, she leaned over and kissed Jake—kissed him again and again. She said: "Oh, you'll be all right. David can do it."

They wheeled him into the operating room. She stayed without and waited.

CHAPTER LIX

BATTLE WITH DEATH

CHICKIE arranged flowers in Jake's room—all autumn flowers now, rich and full of color. He was like that.

She moved about in a still tightness, touching his brushes on the bureau—plain ebony brushes.

How incredible this thing that had happened—and the pallor in that flashing, magnificent face—the red, smiling mouth, now faintly blue.

She walked mechanically down the hall to the door of the operating room and stood there.

She knew the breathless scene behind that door—David down in the pit fighting with a passion of zeal; his face growing masklike in its intensity of concentration. He would save Jake—if power on earth could do it. He thought Jake a princely fellow—

Then her heart rapped noisily. Jake lying on that table and David battling to save that great and generous life. Great and generous he was. Once another room was filled with flowers, the beauty of the springtime sent to her who felt her life all finished. It was Jake who did that thing; Jake who wrote: "Little white darling, don't let this sadness rob or cheat you. Take it as a richening of your life."

All that was finest and truest in his spirit he had given to her. At every turn of her life some kindness of his had smoothed her way. Even the dog he had given, licking her face the day she stumbled between the oak trees and the baby lay dead in her arms.

Oh—to return a hundredfold now that lordly kindness—to spare him, even if only a little pain. She went back to the room. Her hands were cold and shaking. Prayers stirred in her mind.

Save him. They must. The world had need of high and glowing hearts—and few that beat with the mighty, happy pulse of his.

October and the sun was setting; the light in the room

purpling and soft. It fell wistfully on a basket of lilies, white lilies of the valley. These Janina had sent. And the light was radiant on marigolds, gift of an old, gaunt woman—brought with the woman's tears. Jake had been good to her. She could never say how good, and to a son of hers.

Chickie said to the woman: "He was good to me, too. And to many."

The woman answered: "I am going home to pray for him."

Jake would like that. The kind, ironic smile would come flashing to his lips. Pray for him, of course! He wouldn't mind. But did they think he was done? Not much! And new paths yet untrod—

Coming back that she might walk new ways with him. Coming back to bring her all the fine and pleasant things he thought life owed her.

She went again down the hall. An hour. Then an hour and a half. A movement—the door of the operating room opening, the sheeted form, kingly even in its quiet, wheeled out.

Chickie shut her eyes, sudden tears rushing to their corners. Terrible that Jake should be lying on that stretcher, who only yesterday exulted in the glory of his strength.

How was he? How had it been? She was afraid to ask. But she saw David coming from the room and waited. His face had a gray, set look, almost skeletal in its thinness. His eyes were brilliant.

He saw her tears and turned his head. She asked with a pitiful, unnatural quiet: "He came out well?"

"Fair—"

"Oh—only that, David?"

"He has a ruptured liver—"

She gave a soft, low cry, knowing the desperateness of that, and suddenly overcome put her hands over her face.

He said gently: "No—you're not giving up, Helena. Jake has a chance—a good fighting chance. He has a lion's strength. And he's in our hands. I think we've got to save him! Come now—suppose you go and rest. I'm staying. Come back in a few hours."

She smiled and bit her lips, hearing him say that. "Oh—you don't know all Jake once did for me. You don't know how I feel for him. I wouldn't leave now for anything—not for anything."

Yet when she went into Jake's room and saw the bed tilted;

saw all the flowers removed; looked into his colorless face and shut eyes, she wanted to run away; escape that unnatural image. It was so different from the rollicking, exuberant fellow who had so often sat at her side.

When he was again conscious she was even afraid because of the shallow, uneven breath; afraid because he yawned and seemed struggling for air.

She put her hand timidly on his. He gave no sign, except to murmur, "Water—a drink—"

David didn't leave the room. He gave orders to the nurse. Jake said, "Come here, Dave. I'm faint. Give me a shot—something—"

"You're all right. It's good for you to be faint. Don't worry about it."

"No air—"

"Yes—you have air—"

A marked blueness now around his lips and at his fingers. Chickie shut her eyes. She began to pray. For a long while Jake lay quiet as though utterly exhausted, only rousing to ask again and again for a drink. She gave him spoons of very hot tea.

He seemed not to notice her presence until once she rose. A smile went faintly over his face: "Helena—going?"

"No—of course not."

Then he slept fitfully. And she could swear that the life and the health was stealing gently with a soft color to his lips. She said this to David.

He looked at her steadily: "I don't expect that—not yet. . . ."

When she came back to the room it was dawn and the sky seen from the window was all shot with color. Jake was again awake. He watched her moving through the room.

She made a picture in his mind—shadowy and white—last of a long line of pictures. His eyes remained on her face as though to fasten the image forever in his thoughts.

He opened his hand for hers. When she placed it in his palm, he smiled: "White darling—waited too long—"

"No—Jake—you're better—"

His glance wandered from her eyes to her throat—he was deep in thought—there was a day last spring when she had raised her face and let him kiss her. He remembered it now and murmured something—

She said: "What do you say, Jake?"

The smile deepened on his mouth—the room became alive with many memories—exultant days—perfumes of flowers—moons and trees, purple in the night. Short, disjointed phrases came to his lips: "A good way, Helena—"

She said, gently: "Yes—Jake, some old lady came and brought you flowers because you were so good to her. Did you know of it?"

She wondered if he heard, for his eyes closed. But presently he said, "I hear you—I'm better now—"

He slept. She watched his face and grew alarmed because his breath was short and gaspy—grew more alarmed because David came and felt his pulse—and sat a long time studying him.

She followed him out of the room. "He's not worse . . ."

"No—not worse. We'll have to give him blood. He lost so much—"

"That means you haven't much hope . . ."

"I have hope—I have hope . . ."

"When will you do this . . ."

"As soon as possible . . . this afternoon—"

This came to her with a blow. She did not go back to the room—she had a queer feeling that they were betraying Jake—that she somehow was failing him—that he would see in her eyes her coward fears—

When finally he called for her and she put her hand again on his, he said in a piercing, quiet way: "I'm not afraid, Helena. It was a good life—a sweet way—"

"What do you mean, Mr. Jake—"

"Finished, Helena—an old dog—done now—"

Tears rushed into her eyes. They dropped warmly. She bent her soft face near to his. "You will be better—this is to cure you—oh, Jake—we're not to let you go—"

The smile was on his lips, but faintly—"I think I'm done—I think I've got to go alone—after all—alone—"

She stopped the words with her lips on his and he murmured, "Helena—yes—white darling—yes—"

CHAPTER LX

THE FORKED ROAD

He was one who had walked gladly with Life; found her ways were pleasant ways; let her have an odd caprice or two—no bickering about it.

Life and he were chums, marching jubilant and arm in arm. They reached the parting, so it seemed. He saw her face of beauty, pale now and wistful, with remembered joys; saw her stand so quiet to look with sad, averted eyes, down paths that he was not to go.

Too soon for this! And new bright roads just opening. Too soon for this, and the pulse within his heart learning a sweeter tune.

He would stay! Have this last dear gift. Life had not cheated yet. Wait—

Blurred images went flying with an unimagined swiftness through his mind; faces in a mist; voices flinging out a song. Fainter—more distant—steps running away—echoes of terror falling.

Something else—something else—grasp it!

Jake's eyes opened from their deep apathy and in a startled way fixed on Chickie's face. His mouth, now dully pallid, curved in flickering, triumphant tenderness. There sat the whiteness and the beauty—waiting. As he wished it! As, in his proud exultance, he demanded.

He struggled with his thought. "Was it last night, Helena?"

"Two nights ago."

"You waited?"

"Oh, yes—"

"Wanting me?"

"Of course—oh, really, Mr. Jake!"

A lilt went warmly from his lips up to his eyes; gave him a moment that high and swaggering look like the night he said with such a mocking gladness: "Why don't you take the man? You can make him finer than silk!"

Chickie, seeing that challenge now on Jake's dulled, pallid

face, felt a great tenderness for him; a longing to bring back the vital color; oh, the humming devil-may-care. Do something! Not sit here idle listening to his sighing, intermittent breath; sit here and watch the deepening apathy.

She had a feeling that Jake, in her place, would keep the life in her veins; would manage some way to save her. He would gather her in his strong, mighty arms and dare any death to tear her from him.

Hard, aching thoughts were these. They brought the melting and the warmth in an unbearable tide of sorrow over her. She could no longer endure the anxious, restless movements of his fingers on her wrist. She stole softly to the hall.

Afternoon now—David would be coming. He would make a new stand; new tremendous fight. Chickie waited, staring from a window. No sooner did the door of Jake's room close than the weak image of him lying on that bed faded.

He was again before her in his pride and in his strength. She remembered the day she went bumping against him on Montgomery Street; the day she had the sapphire pin in her pocket and her hand bounded out like a spring to return it. How he had mocked her! "Hey there—must you knock the man down with your righteousness, gurrl?" Keep the pin—meant no harm. Why, safe as a babe in the Madonna's arms, she was in his. He told her that. And he had proved it. He had been the finest, truest friend, always.

Why, that time Jonathan was so gaunt and frightened because his savings were gone. Jake warned him against that oil, but that was the way with an obstinate old fellow like Jonathan. He did it anyhow. Then Chickie must go to Jake and ask what he could do—what he would do now—

Poignantly she remembered her reluctance. So brazen to walk into Jake's office, asking favors. He would think things—judge her for it.

Think things? Not he! He looked into her heart when it was dazzling in its purity. And read it right. "Why, bless her, the dear, worrying for others. Bless Jonathan and his oil stock that he sends my girl to me!" That was Jake's way—that was the bigness of him.

All her memories of Jake had this touch of laughter; yet this touch of the fine nobility about them.

Oh—terrible to think of him as passing; terrible to see that lordly soul go down! What an emptiness it would be—and

what a long, long quiet! Life would never yield another friend like that—

They were not to let him go! They must hold him here!

She pressed her forehead against the window. Far out a tiny yacht rode bravely on the waters, its shiny sail full breasted to the breeze; then a fishing smack went bustling with a long trail of smoke through the Gate and a cloud of lavender drifted like a veil across the face of Tamalpais. Like yesterday—like to-morrow—

Why should one ask the world to weep—tears enough—she shut her eyes. Her face was chalky with the strain of the long vigil. She didn't hear David till he was at her side. He said simply: "Why are you here?"

"Jake thinks that he is dying. It will be awful if he dies—if we let him die!"

It rang out from her like an accusation. And David, seeing her eyes half blinded, heard in it the relentless, desperate voice of love.

He said: "Yes—life has a way of doing awful things."

"Oh—you have no hope. What do you mean? You said there was hope."

"There is always hope. He has, at best, a battle."

Her eyes accosted him. "What will you do? Oh, something—surely!"

"For Jake, Helena, and for you, no one could do more than I've done. I've never fought so hard—never—"

He drew in his breath sharply and she noticed his face finely drawn—the haggard lines about his mouth. He hadn't slept, perhaps. He had come a score of times; he had watched through the two long nights with Jake—as though Jake were a brother.

She turned her head swiftly. How cruel one can be when grief has its tooth in the heart.

In the next few hours not any brother could have battled with a greater love; none with a more flaming skill.

He said to Chickie when the blood transfusion was over and Jake seemed easier, even stronger: "In higher hands than ours, now—"

"David, don't say that."

"Nothing more can be done."

Yet Jake rallied and his eyes lost their startled look. For the interval of an hour or so he seemed stronger. Now and

then a chill passed through him. . . . Yet there was a serenity about him lying there—the dignity of the king that he was falling like a garment about him—

It pierced her. She had never seen his face so white; never the hair going in such massy waves from the lofty forehead and the red mouth that had been so flashing in its joy now pale and straightened.

Yet a supremacy about him. He was not the one to yield. Why, Death was a good fellow, perhaps—chummy as Life.

And if one must walk with Death why, then, one doffs his hat and swings along—

So he talked awhile, with long pauses in between, fighting to keep the smile on his face—fighting to keep all fears behind. Something unnerving in this majesty of his will. He looked to David once and said: "Thanks, old fellow—finished?"

"Look here, Jake—you have a chance—"

"I know. Stay, Helena—stay with me. I'll not be long—"

Not easy to smile into his anxious eyes; not easy to say: "Why, Jake—you're supposed to get better—oh, really. You're stronger."

"My time—here now. Are those tears, Helena? Why? I had the best of life—no kick—"

The late afternoon sun made yellow patches on the walls—the sky was luminous and blue. Jake's eyes wandered to the light and to the window—ah—leaving that, too—and all that one can so enjoy—

But he said: "The best of life—yes—"

Suddenly the smile was half mocking on his mouth, relieved its anxious pain. "All but the best—Helena—give it to me—you can. Put your arms about me—the last time."

A soft cry broke from her. She did then what Jake had often asked and long awaited. She put her arms gently about him, pressed her lips willingly on his, and on his eyes.

There came again that lilt and the smile of a deep, triumphant tenderness—"Sweeter—whiter—my Helena—"

Even as he spoke, bewilderment like the flash of a knife went into his eyes. Jake's hand tightened convulsively and loosened on hers.

Some one had arms about her; some one whispered, "Our friend is gone."

CHAPTER LXI

FAREWELL

So Jake looked back without regret and forward without fear. He turned from all the vital, glowing things to face the empty quiet—no murmuring about it.

Farewell to Life and smiled. Not glad to go, dear Life. But since one must, why then, a smile for death. Who knows—Death, too, may prove a friend? Who knows what new adventure she may show?

That rich and questing look was on his face and a majesty come now to dwell upon its regal line and color. In death, as in life, it was the face of a king.

Midnight—the hundred friends were gone. Chickie came to pay her tribute—oh, to give a service to the well-loved friend; see that things might be as he would wish them.

Jake's lips were red and smiling—the kind, ironic smile, as though he were just speaking; or as though he were about to say: "Well, gone alone, you see—after all, alone. What—crying? Not for your old friend Jake, my darling. Why, look at the man! He's well enough, God wot, and always will be!"

She touched Jake's hand—the warm, magnetic hand that had so clasped on hers whenever ways were hard; that had so steadied her, not once, but many times. Had she half thanked him? Half enough rejoiced in all his princely ways?

Oh, she had—and always glad to see him; always writing five or seven letters to his one. She loved Jake—grateful now that she had told him so; loved him greatly, even as the cherished Jonathan.

There would be a great aloneness with him gone; a chillness and a want. She would miss the black eyes wooing hers; miss the deep exuberance of his laugh. But more than this, that high, unalterable faith of his that she was sweet; that she was white and as pure as any.

Did Jake know how dear such words could be to her? "White darling"—he said she was that thing and he would shout it to her.

She was not that to a judging world—never that to others. They saw a stain. But he was one to look beyond a deed; beyond a troubled surface to the crystal spring beneath.

How she wanted that! Not even Jennie, who was her mother, had such a trust as Jake. She looked at the glossy waves of hair, the smiling mouth. How mellowed and how fine he was! How desolate that he should here lie quiet.

There would never be a second friend as he had been; never another to look with such clear vision to the inmost soul and know that it had not been hurt; that it was sound and true and grown very strong.

She was indeed alone now—most piercingly alone—and must be always—

David came then and stood beside her—a great sadness in his winning eyes. Strange that he should walk upon her thoughts then—strange that seeing the grief in his face there should come upon her such a flood of aching memory; such a gratitude to the dear and silent friend, that she must speak.

Her words poured out like a blessing—a holy ointment of her thanks. It was due to Jake.

As though to her own thought she spoke: "Once when life seemed done for me; when it was very hard, Jake came. He said the noblest things. He was as kind. No one can know, not any one, the greatness that he did."

David looked at her white face and her deep, tremulous eyes. They were filled with tears. He would have told her that he knew Jake's service and blessed him; that he heard Jake's murmur: "Sweeter—whiter—my Helena—" and that he bowed to Jake for that.

But she seemed not to see or care. She seemed then to him more lonely than the dead—lonelier than the picture Emerson had drawn of her that had whipped up in him such a maddening desire to rush down and look at her; see if her face might be the same; speak to her; say out his thoughts—

She was standing now with an infinite, yearning tenderness on her face as it had been in that last moment when she stooped to put her arms on Jake.

The friend who had helped her and who had her trust was gone. He wondered what she would do now. She would become more aloof—more shut away than ever. More tragic than a death is that—

He said softly: "Yes—there was a greatness in him—he understood."

She turned away sharply, wondering how he came to say a thing like that. Then she added: "How sad that there should come a time when we cannot do anything at all for those we love—when we stand silent and let them pass—it seems to me as though all gladness leaves the earth with Jake—"

She tried to smile, but the tears were in her throat. For it was so, indeed. Jake's friendship and his love for her kept her in tune with the brightness of life. It was his way to bring her joys—a flower or a jewel—

No other did this. She had Jennie and Jonathan; Mary and Janina. They had her love.

In these last years, though, it was always she who brought the merriment to them; not they to her. In these new times it was Chickie who surprised Jennie with a new waist; Jonathan with a richly colored tie; or the two of them with little pastries for dinner.

And when she called on Mary there were the children, of course—trinkets for them and toys.

But from Jake she had taken and taken. He wanted that. What was a sapphire bracelet! Only that it gave a sparkle or two to her eyes.

And what was a basket of orchids if she would blush with a childish delight at his extravagance!

Many, many days his face was in her thoughts—the rollicky light in his eyes. She would stop short in her work because of tears—or to say to herself: "Oh, gone! Not really—" and then a whole troupe of smiling, vital Jakes stepped before her.

She heard him often as that moment when he said: "Now wait—'tis the first time, begorra, your friend, Mr. Munson, ever spoke of marriage—"

One night she went home for dinner. Jonathan took Jake's death much to heart: "That was the friend of friends, Chickie girl. That was one of God's own noblemen—"

And Jennie, with her old-fashioned ideas, wished to visit the grave—why, yes, when Thanksgiving came let them all go down and fill their arms with flowers. You don't know—the dear ones gone may like a thought like that. There they are up behind the golden benches looking down to see if one forgets or if one holds the memory warm and most beloved.

This night Chickie wanted only Wildie with her—wanted a long, long walk.

Five years there had been walks with the dog—just five years since Jake had brought him—since the night he stood in the hall, so tickled to find her glad. Yet when she stooped, enraptured, and kissed the dog, Jake's face grew white and he said with a sharp breath: "Here! Don't you do that again! Not while I'm around!"

She hadn't trusted Jake a great deal in those days. How wrong one's vision often is!

There was that old hill on Sanchez Street where she could see the water and the many, many stars. The last night she had ridden with Jake there had been a moon like this. That was the night he took her to the bluff above the old stone crusher—the bluff that crowns Ninth Avenue.

The ocean was all mystery and cloud—then he stooped down, the rich eyes touching hers with exuberant fire, to ask: "Do I go alone?" And then to say that he would be the one to bring her all the wondrous things life owed!

And now—gone from her—he reached out to drop more gifts in Chickie's lap—it was of these that she must think. The seven dollars he had left her in his will—not seven only—a sum that staggered Chickie's thought.

Jake left to Jonathan in trust for her and she was to have it when she was twenty-six—she was to have $30,000 and to do with it whatever she might like—just anything. The lawyer told her Jake said that very thing—

It filled her heart with an odd fear. Oh, not for her was all this wealth. He meant she must do well with it—something to make him proud—she wondered what—

CHAPTER LXII

WIDENING VISTA

She felt half sad that Jake had given her all this money. She had told him he must send her $7 and quick. For she was to open a foundling asylum where every child would be God's blessed child no matter who it was nor that it had but stolen passports.

In a whimsical bitterness she wrote this—that night she felt so certain love and sweetness were not for her, so she must have a mission in her life. That was the time David went to Stockton and she dreaded so what he would hear; the time Jake was coming back to say that she must marry him—a thing she could not do.

It was quite in jest she wrote and to hide her panic at the vision of long, empty years. . . .

But now the money would be in her hands. She was bewildered with a sense of its responsibility.

Wildie brought her sticks, for he wanted notice. She threw the sticks so listlessly he pawed and gave sharp, inquiring yaps as though to say: "Wake up, will you! Make it worth my while to fetch them!"

But he was an understanding fellow and resigned to a pretty lady's moods. So finally he stretched himself forth at her feet, reaching up now and then to lick her hand, or rub his moist, sleek nose along her arm.

A lot Jake would care what she did with the money! Why, he would be the very one to say: "Take yourself to town, my dear, and deck yourself in pearls and laces!" He didn't like old ruins wrapped with the flowers of May. The sweets of life were for the young and for the beautiful and it is suicide to kill the joy that should be ours. That was Jake's creed.

He mocked when she said so fervently that she was done with asking gifts of life; her turn had come to serve. Ho—she meant to climb a martyr's pyre and thought that he would bring the torch to light it? Not much! He loved life far too well to see a beauty in denial.

She mused in a vagrant way on this and how her life had shifted; the very fiber of her nature altered. Five years ago—three years ago she would not long have pondered where and how to spend a fortune. Then it was enough to see herself all color in a dress of shimmery green; to know herself so sweet with perfume at her ears.

How far away that airy, flippant shadow seemed. Half with a touch of cynicism she regarded it, wondering why all this change had come; and if, after all, as Janina said, we should not care what tools life uses nor through what flaming furnace she is pleased to send us so that we come out fine and strong in the end.

She got up. Wildie stretched with long, sensuous yawns. At their feet, the city wearing her thousand ropes of glowing amber jewels slept on a purple couch beneath the hills.

Nothing decided. Oh—well—time yet. Still a few months before she was twenty-five—then a year before this new wealth would be completely in her hands.

But it was nearing the end of her training. Soon she would be finished, then she would start out for herself—then she would be a person, alone.

She thought a great deal of this. It brought a winged sadness to her eyes; a depth that was appealing to the young, pale mouth.

David noticed it. Her loneliness affected him in a desolate way. She was very gentle; very eager in all her work, but she would not go out with him. She kept this up until he wondered if she had loved Jake, and, even on that fated night, was awaiting his coming. Was that the reason she canceled all her dates with him?

He remembered vividly the pain and sweetness on her face when she kissed Jake; remembered, too, that twice in those nights when he brought her a cup of coffee, aching to see her so white, so troubled, she had taken it without seeming to notice him. He was well aware that she had not thanked him. So perhaps her heart was lost with Jake.

This explanation piqued him; made him restless and unhappy. For he was young, and she had turned eyes dewy and tender to his. She had said, "You're glorious!" And he liked that. Then, once she had been glad to have his arms about her. Trifles, but they thrilled warmly all along his nerves.

Then there was the picture of her in the garden, tears on

her lashes when she read that book of young and flaming love. Would she cry so if she were in love with Jake? Would she have let him hold her hands as she did—and as he now remembered?

No—it pleased him better to believe that he was dismissed because of that old thing in her life rather than because of a tragic love for Jake.

So he persisted. The more aloof she was, the more impatient he became. And the more it seemed cruel and pathetic that she should hold to this idea of punishment; that with such a quiet pride she should close out the gladness from her life.

One night as he was leaving the hospital he saw her walking down the block. He followed slowly. At a corner she stopped and looked out at the waters.

He drove close behind her and said: "Lonesome, Girl? Like to take a ride?"

She turned with a sharp, indignant glance. He laughed and with a deep bow pulled off his hat.

"You frightened me."

"Is that the way you look when frightened? For a moment I had the shivers. Please come with me."

He looked quite boyish and said it in a very humble way that greatly pleased her. She hesitated: "I have some work to do . . ."

He repeated, and taking her arm: "Please come. You've not talked to me in weeks. I wonder why—you really haven't the right to end a thing in this queenly fashion without 'by your leave, or go to hell' or any little gracious word like that—"

For the first time in weeks a merriment rippled from her heart.

"Oh, come on, then—won't you, Helena—there are some things you ought to say to me. I've been hungering for them—"

She wanted to go. It was dark. No one would see them.

She went—it was a fragrant Indian summer night though the time was November. The wind was soft and the moon yellow as old gold.

They stopped on a hill in the Presidio. Through the eucalyptus trees, now faintly veiled with fog, they saw, across the straits, the peaks etched sharply in a reddened sky. They talked of Jake.

Chickie said it made her sad to look at moons that trail

their shiny veils on waters—and skies that are a thousand colors—to look on these and know that one who has rejoiced so much may not again behold their beauty. . . .

He said: "Yes—but in forty years Jake lived more deeply than another in two hundred. There's something in that."

"I didn't think that he would die. He seemed so filled with life. I thought even at the last minute that he was getting better. Didn't you?"

"No—as soon as he was on the table—well—there was the one chance—sometimes a miracle is granted. We always hope for that. . . ."

"Why, even then, you knew?"

"I feared—"

"You didn't act it. . . . You fought as though you were going to win—"

"Did I?"

"Don't you know that you did?" She suddenly saw him more intently than at the time as he had worked—as he had watched—as he had done so many things through nights and through days. . . .

"Yes—I know that I did—but I wondered if you thought so. Well—I think I wanted your approval, Miss Nurse—"

"My approval—" Her tone curved and suddenly the blood raced to her cheeks. "What could you want with my approval?"

"Do I get it?"

"Oh, indeed you do—"

He reached over and took her hand in his quick, domineering way. He said, "That's one of the things I've hungered to hear, Girl—"

She said aloud, "Oh—" and would have pulled her hands free—he would not let her.

CHAPTER LXIII

CONFESSION

David went on:

"And another thing I want to know, Helena, is this—do you refuse my company because you don't like me?"

"Oh, no—"

"Do you like me?"

"Yes—very much—"

"Don't say it in such a remote way, if you please, as though speaking of snow-covered mountains—"

She kept her head down, her thought repeating with astonished delight, "He wants my approval! Mine! Oh, think of that!"

And it was sweet to have his hand clasped so on hers—he had such strong and vital hands—and to feel his eyes full of eager warmth. She wished he wouldn't speak—just sit and watch the crimson flame steal back into the clouds—watch the pallid fogs come with sad dreams and murmur to the mountains.

She said: "I love this scene at night. You know I've never traveled, so I feel very thankful life dropped me on this doorstep, with the water and hills and trees flung out so royal like."

"'Twas kind in life to drop us here. Will your poetry keep, Miss? As I was saying, since you like me very, very much and I like you and want your company, why are we denied?"

"Are we? We're here, I thought." Then she added, faintly sensing her insincerity: "Well, we aren't alone in the world. There are many things to think about."

"Let's think of them. You won't come out with me. I'm just conceited enough to be irritated by this. Why shouldn't you go out with me? I'm a nice, sober young man, rather presentable, don't you think? Now I want to know—I demand to know—why I'm turned down. If it's because of my own shortcomings then I suppose I'll have to stay down, but if it's on the world's account—we'll see. What do you mean

saying we aren't alone in the world? Do you think I didn't know that?"

She considered a moment, fearful of choosing the wrong word: "Oh, well—you know how people talk of doctors and of nurses. And you're just starting out—you should be careful."

"Just starting out! Now I thank you for that word of grace!"

"I mean, sir—that the biggest things are all before you. It is the world who will bring these to you. So you're bound to consider the world's opinion. Your success depends on it—"

"It does? And I suppose my friends on Rincon Hill and Mr. Cabbages in Visitacion Valley are going to demand a squint at my family crest before allowing me to put a knife in them? I don't have to worry about the world's opinion. I've seventeen cents or so on my own account. So I'm really not dependent on a large private practice. And at present I'm more interested in hospital work.

"What's your next argument?"

She felt oppressed—a chill stole over her. She said in a quiet, beaten way: "Oh, I think you know exactly what I mean. I've chosen the way I have to go. I'm not going to turn from it. And you're not as immune as you think. The world's judgment cannot always be scoffed into silence. It is a bitter thing to bear."

He opened her hands and looked at them, musing—then at her face. There was a tenderness and a light in his: "Don't you think, Miss Nurse, that I'm big enough to look out for myself? Do I need a thin slip like you are to fight my way?"

"No—you don't, Dr. David. And you may think I'm slim, but even so I know what I should do and what I wish to do and what I have to do. You don't need me to protect you, perhaps, but there's my side of it."

"What may that be, Helena?"

"Well—people will see me out with you. They will think it quite out of order. They will talk of me, and that I left one hospital—" She smiled, drawing in her lips. "And then they will talk of you. I don't think you should want me to be put in such a position—oh, well—of interfering with your career—"

"What people say can't interfere with my career. I've told you that—"

"All right—then it interferes with my happiness to be regarded as one who hurts others—"

His fingers clinched on her wrist: "One who hurts others! When have you hurt any one, Helena—how can you hurt any one?"

She drew her hand free, becoming very busy tucking in locks of hair. . . . "It's a beautiful night, isn't it—I'm awfully tired—can't we have the problems some other time? You know this is the first peaceful hour I've had in weeks and weeks. I'd much appreciate it, most kind sir, if you would allow me to forget yesterday and the day before—and just have this moment. No—really, David—I've only a few months more—not even that long, and you let me finish—then after that we can see—"

"What do you intend to do when you finish—"

She laughed. "Oh—didn't you know? I've seven dollars. That's what Jake left me in his will so that I could have a mission in my life. . . ."

"Yes? Well, I can't believe Jake would wish such a fate on you. He'd tell you there were better things than missions. . . ."

"But you don't think so, David, do you—you have a mission? That's what I think so fine in you."

"Let's hear about that—will you?"

"My mission, you mean—"

"What's so fine in me—or rather what you think fine in me—"

"Two months and nineteen days from to-night I'll tell you. But it's true about Jake. Did you know he gave me $30,000?"

And she told him of a hundred things Jake had done for her and this last sum of money and she was to build a castle near the ocean and it would be for children people didn't want and they should have everything and be raised in glory and with all manner of nobility about them.

He listened and grew sober, then a warm sadness came to dwell in his eyes. "Do you think you can do all this on $30,000?"

"Isn't that an enormous amount of money?"

"No—not for such a dream as yours. I guess there'll have to be another $7 subscribed. When are you to begin . . ."

"When I'm twenty-six—"

"Rather a tender age to be playing mother to all the abandoned world. Is twenty-six a long time from now?"

"A year and a few months—"

"Jake was to help you with this?"

"He said he would—"

"Well—Miss—you'll need expert assistance and advice. I can recommend some one for the place—and you'll have to begin on a very small scale."

He kept on talking but his mind grew excited, then impatient. All this talk of hers was to put him off—and why? He decided to say abruptly: "I came down from Moppett to tell you that I love you." To lean down to her and say: "Hush—I love you!"

She was sitting forward a little. She had taken off her hat. A mist was in her hair and her face white as the now luminous and paling moon. With a dreamy grace she turned her head upward: "You aren't listening to me, David. I thought you meant to help me in this."

In the gloom he beheld her eyes and her parted lips. He moved toward them, smiling. He put his arms about her.

For a moment she was awed by his look; by the tremulous nearness, then she closed her eyes, and with a gentle, almost imperceptible movement, averted her face. It gave him a sharp, piercing hurt. He said to himself, witheringly: "She doesn't care for me."

She repeated in a soft, strained voice: "But you don't mean to help me?"

"Yes—I will help you in this, or in anything—" He was impatient now to be alone. He was shaken and afraid that she might notice.

For this was inconceivable. He had had an idea she did care. What gave him that? What had made him so sure?

He rattled the gears and swore softly to himself when they balked.

She heard, but it ran like a far distant sound—deep and even melodious to her thoughts. She, too, was eager for the quiet—

She smiled when he said: "Good-by—then—" and she didn't look at his face.

In her room there was no light. Miss Pruett, her dark, precise face on her folded hands, like a child, was sleeping. Chickie tiptoed across the room, sat on her bed.

She remained thus motionless, her hands pressed to her lips.

She was conscious of a laughter opening in her heart and of a still agitation—

She felt fingers on her wrist, then arms about her. She said to herself, "Oh, no—no."

She closed her eyes—the laughter rose.

It was an hour before thought stole in like a wave over this strange, unreckoning emotion—an hour before she began to think.

Then she lay in bed, smiling cynically, because tears trickled to her pillow. She said to herself: "Too bad about you—oh, a great pity about you!"

CHAPTER LXIV

THE SNUB

For two days she didn't see David. She was aware that she was waiting for him.

She argued coldly with her own thought. Every argument ended with the memory of his arms reached about her and with his face kindled and tender moving down to hers.

She said to herself in a frightened way: "I don't want this! I have nothing to do with this!" But when she was in the room of one of his patients and the door opened she grew breathless with excitement and found it hard to raise her eyes.

The image of him, tall and gallant as he reached out from the machine to call: "Lonesome, girl? Take a ride—" came to her a dozen times. The lean face was laughing. She thought it handsome because of a warmth and because the gray eyes were understanding, but mostly because it was clean-cut and vital with the winning glory of youth about it.

She heard him saying: "Since you like me very, very much and I like you, what has the world got to do with it? Don't you think I'm big enough to look for myself?" He turned her hands and looked at them, musing, half mocking—

Against her will these scenes returned; against her will there was an expectance and a half fearful gladness running like echoes of a distant song through all her thoughts—

At the end of the second day, as she was coming down the steps of the hospital she saw him getting into his machine. It was eight o'clock, the night still and dark, the languor of summer in its breath.

He regarded her a moment as though hesitating, then he swept off his hat and drove off. A chill cut through her. Suddenly her eyes were smarting. She walked around the corner to the Nurses' Home, her head very high.

When she reached her room she sat on the edge of the bed, her arms folded. She was shaking as though she had been slapped.

After a while she got up and looked into the dreary back-

yard. It was a deep hole of darkness. She pressed her face against the cold glass. It was like the shivering sickness in her heart.

She stood almost an hour without the will to move or to think. Finally she said with a grim quiet, "I'm glad."

Then her thoughts let loose. She needed this—just what she needed! She would not forget again. She knew the way she must go—stick to it.

With a cold, pitiless pride she regarded herself and the flush of emotion that had stolen through her. In that moment she was relentless enough and harsh enough to have slain forever a gladness in her thoughts.

She needed no one! Wished no one! Her way was clear before her. No one would ever be hurt by her; no one should ever be allowed to stoop to her—patronize her!

With an abnormal sensitiveness she imagined David had realized the folly of that moment and regretted it. He, too, had gone over the scene of the night; he had been carried away by the charm of hills and water and a face that glowed palely in the dark. Afterwards he had been cool enough to consider and to repent.

Afterwards he was calm enough to realize the impetuous blindness of this friendship for her; and to acknowledge the hurt it could do to himself and his future. So he was avoiding her.

She sat down before the bureau, slowly took off her cap. He would not be troubled by her!

In the next few weeks she hid behind a smiling and gracious reserve. Once when it was near Christmas time he stopped her in the hall: "Make an exception for once, will you, and come to the symphony with me—please?"

"No, I cannot."

"You really mean to keep this up, then?"

"Oh, yes! I quite mean it." She said it in a tone of ice, and for an instant he looked down at her with an astonished doubt in his eyes. His mouth had a grim look.

"Well—very well—I guess I'm a bit thick now and then!"

He left her with the uncomfortable feeling that she had done a cruel and needless thing.

And she remembered his many services; remembered his bigness, coming that day when she had reached the end of her hope—insisting so that she keep on—she must—then waiting

for her afterwards and seeming so glad for her triumph. . . .

Well—no matter—some things must be done! No choice at all!

She used to wish that the years would hurry—that she was finished and out—that she was thirty-five or forty and settled in old, quiet ways.

In these days she wanted so often to cry. Her spirit was forever putting up its hands to push away memories—to force itself to look with straight and quiet eyes onward—and only onward—

Once after a very exhausting operation he said to her in the genial way he had: "Well—you're a good little nurse! It's almost two months and nineteen days—do you know that—"

She pretended to have forgotten. He added, "I'm to hear a few things then—"

She smiled, saying evasively: "Much may happen in days and weeks!"

He answered shortly, "Well, lady, that's so, isn't it?" A line of color shot into his cheeks.

After this he was almost formal to her. One afternoon as she was coming off duty she met him in the corridor. Two women were with him, one was a girl—the other tall and elderly. Almost with panic Chickie recognized the high shoulders of Mrs. Burdell.

She was so startled that she bowed.

Mrs. Burdell's face turned crimson, her lips compressed. Then her smile became vague and unseeing. She took David's arm and began talking in a vivacious, quick undertone.

Chickie went to the door, feeling as if she had passed through waves of fire.

She would have avoided him that evening, but he came straight to the room where she was on duty. He called her into the hall. Without any introduction he said: "Did you bow to Mrs. Burdell this afternoon?"

"Yes—I did."

"She's an aunt of mine. Did you know that?"

Chickie's breath labored. She would not look at him. "Yes—I know it."

"Odd. How is it you've never spoken of her?"

"Well—I suppose there are a few people we both know and haven't discussed."

"Do you know her rather well?"

"Fairly—why the cross examination?"

"Where did you meet her?"

"I don't recall all the circumstances."

"Was it recently?"

"In the summer—I believe."

"In the summer—well! I didn't know you were in New York this summer—"

Chickie glanced up at him, her lips drawn. His mouth had a hard, angry look. His eyes were deep and cold.

"My aunt doesn't recall meeting you—she thought you had mistaken her for some one else. So she said! And you tell me you met her in the summer. Now what's the mystery?"

She didn't answer. He reached down and took her hand, held it a moment. His own shook. "In the merest friendship you owe some candor to me, don't you? What do you owe to her that you won't speak?"

She felt things freezing and grim in her mind. She said quietly: "I will tell you. No reason why I shouldn't. Your aunt knows me. She has reason to remember me. She made it her business to get acquainted. She came out here and sought the meeting."

He asked with an ominous control: "Why?"

"She had some things she wished to say to me."

"When was this?"

"In the end of August or early in September—I'm not sure."

"Yes? And so you wrote a note to me and canceled dates?"

"I did not write it because of Mrs. Burdell!"

"You didn't? What did she say to you, Helena?"

"It doesn't matter what she said. It is of no consequence to me. As far as I am concerned the matter is closed."

"Is this true, Helena? It means nothing to you?"

"Yes, it is true."

"Well—it means something to me. What she said is of great consequence to me—"

She smiled—looking at the white walls before her: "Then it must be between you and your aunt. If you want to know what she said, you will have to ask her. It is of no meaning to me—none—"

He looked at her until her face stained. Then he said: "We'll see about that!"

CHAPTER LXV

LOVE

CHICKIE went back to her patient. She moved in a fiery stillness. Scraps of Mrs. Burdell's accusations darted into her mind: "Morally loose!" "You do as you please and then come back and attempt to marry a man of prestige and family and brilliance."

She was saying all this now to David. Why was he so angered that his aunt had visited her? Didn't he realize the impossibility of any association between himself and her?

Why then did he have that cold, furious look when he asked what the mystery was? Why did he stare at her in such a hurt, piercing way when she said that matter was of no consequence to her—it was closed.

Chickie kept walking into the hall—snatching a moment to think—to cool her blazing cheeks—to fight against the return of that high tide of feeling. But she remembered that he took her hand, half pleading—"you owe at least some candor to me—in the merest friendship even—"

Now he was gone to his aunt's and in a threatening, hostile mood. "You may not have to answer to me, Helena—though I think you should—but she shall!"

She wondered what he would do—and why—why was it of "the greatest consequence to him"?

David found his aunt at home. She was in her sitting room—a small place furnished in teakwood and with faded colors of dove gray and old wine. She sat now in a deep chair, her feet on a stool. Seeing David, she took off her glasses, the aggressive, olive face softening: "You've come for Dulcie? Why didn't you phone? The dear child didn't even think you'd flattered her by hearing the invitation. So they're gone. My dear boy, honor me with a visit, won't you?" She motioned to a rather ornate cabinet in the corner: "Help yourself."

He ignored this and stood with his arms folded on the back of a high, straight chair. There was a smile on his lips, studied

and cold. He would have to go carefully or he would learn nothing. And he knew Emily Burdell well enough to sense this.

"Thanks, Emily. Too bad I missed Dulcie. I've only a few moments. By the way—" (He spoke with a suppressed quiet.) "Why did you deny knowing Miss Bryce? Don't you recall your rather extraordinary visit to the Nurses' Home a few months ago?"

She pushed her book with a sharp movement along the arm of her chair, her lips tightening: "Yes! Well, I may have reason for forgetting it! And certainly she has! I may have delicacy enough to deny recalling a most unpleasant though necessary interview. But I see she hasn't."

"Who made the scene unpleasant, Emily? And what made it necessary for you to have this interview? To protect me?"

Into his low, deliberate tones went vibrating a surcharge of anger. It was not lost on his aunt.

"Now listen, my dear boy, before you let that little temper of yours fly off. I had good reasons for calling on this Miss Bryce."

"What were they?"

"Plenty, I can assure you. And if the young lady had any feeling and any fairness she would have understood my motives and respected them. She would not, under any circumstances whatever, have repeated the matter to you. It is a shameful breach of confidence."

"Let that go, Emily—but what were your motives? Why play the guardian angel to me? Just why did you presume this far?"

Mrs. Burdell tapped her slippered foot on the stool: "I happen to know a few things about Miss Bryce, David, that you evidently do not. There was no need to excite you about the matter. I appreciate your work sufficiently to save you a needless agitation. But the matter was very grave. Some one had to act. Some one had to let this young lady know that her past was known to your family—and would not be tolerated—"

His eyes took flame . . . he moved toward her: "You mean that you went out and threatened Miss Bryce? You dared to intrude on her affairs?"

"Have the goodness to control yourself. Listen a moment and you may thank me instead of standing there with blood

in your eyes. That temper of yours! I suppose we should let you rush to ruin! I am in a position to hear things that may not reach you. Intrude on her affairs! It is to laugh! The whole town knows her affairs. Why, my dear boy, the girl is notorious—I have reason to believe, haven't I, that you would not care to be seen in public with a woman whose name is a byword?"

"You have reason to mind your own business! And you'll have reason to swallow this! If the whole town is talking, the whole town had damn soon better shut up!"

Mrs. Burdell's face blanched—her mouth opened until it became a dark, gaping hole. Then her eyes narrowed, little gleams shot from under their thin lids. She said in a chugging, furious indignation: "Speak to me so! A gentleman, indeed! Forget yourself! You should be ashamed—your aunt—pretty manners, indeed! But I don't think I shall swallow what I said. Let the girl deny that she had a child—"

His lips seemed almost sunken with the stress of his emotion and his eyes were lighted. He was now towering over Emily's chair: "No—she won't deny it! Miss Bryce had a child. What about it?"

"You must be out of your mind! You ought to be ashamed. Insulting me—a woman old enough to be your mother. Defending a courtesan! You may be pleased to learn that the woman you are acting so insanely about is the castoff mis—"

"Don't say it—! Don't say it—Emily—now or at any time. I warn you—"

She was frightened at the violence of his grip on the chair and at the mottled pallor of his cheeks. She talked in excited gasps, pushing her feet furiously against the stool and standing. She drew her shoulders up, peaked and high: "Don't say it! Who'll stop me?"

"I'll stop you—"

"Indeed—the facts are public. Can you wipe them out? Don't talk like a madman. If you stop me, can you stop others? Every one knows about this girl and that she got hold of Barry Dunne, and he a mere boy—how she all but ruined his life—"

He leaped at the name—it went scorching into his mind—

"Every one knows there was a scandal about it—it hasn't died out yet—so I think I was quite justified. You may not care about the family honor. I do—your sisters do. I wrote

of the matter to them! We have a right to see that the women of the family are above reproach! We have a right to stop at the beginning an affair that may prove disastrous to the entire family."

"Have you, Emily? Try to exercise that right. See how far you get with it. . . . And as for women above reproach—I'll be the judge of that in my own affairs. I should like to meet the woman good enough to look down on Helena Bryce. I should like to believe that you or Dulcie or any one is better than she is!"

She drew back with a choked gasp—"What are you saying—My God—David—consider—come here—"

"And furthermore, Emily—keep out of this. Every word you say against Miss Bryce—you will take back. I am not threatening you. I am stating a fact—"

He picked up his hat from the chair. His aunt stood gauntly—a cruel righteousness stamped on her mouth.

The sight of this homely, old woman and the hardness in her features became repelling to him. She had that look on her when she went out to see Helena—when she talked to her—when she told her that she was not fit for them!

He went rushing down the steps. He looked up and down the block—in his inflamed imagination he could see Chickie as she stood on the corner that afternoon when she was carrying the letter to Mrs. Ellis—that vicious, branding letter.

The loneliness of her—standing there so pale and beautiful. Then he remembered her face, pitifully white, turned to him that day in the sunroom when she said so quietly: "It is done—I have gone—"

The whole world was against her—all of them—the irreproachables!

He wanted to see her—rush out and talk to her. She was off duty now and had probably gone home.

He drove out. All the way the sweet image of Chickie rode with him. He would take her in his arms—he would not permit her to evade.

She was in the wicker living room, her hair drawn back in deep waves, giving an almost luminous delicacy to her mouth and her long, slender throat.

She was surprised, and murmured: "David, why have you come?" Her voice was glad. Then she saw the haggard lines from his nose to his chin—saw his face bloodless.

He reached over and took her hands, drew them to him and stood so, holding them. His eyes sought hers. "Helena—look up at me—"

She did this—and suddenly with a strange sound that was like a sob he put his arms around her. He said: "I love you."

CHAPTER LXVI

THE RIGHT TO LOVE

A MOMENT she listened to his voice in her ears—a lighted moment, winging in music. He loved her. Incredulous as beauty seen in a dream, it was. She stood motionless beholding it—motionless and waiting.

"Helena, you care for me? Say something." He tried to see her eyes. She closed them hurriedly, unwilling that he should find her wild, unreckoning answer shouting there.

He kept talking, the tones growing vibrant and eager. "Speak to me, Helena. I've wanted to tell you this a long while. I've loved you a long while. And you? Say it—"

She would have given the years of her life to look up into David's face and laugh; to say: "Oh—love you! You are too fine. Love you! How can you care for me? I can't believe it. Loving me! Why I—"

An agitation grew in her until it was pain. She said in a confused way: "It is too late, David. Why did you come? Why are you saying this—oh—did you see your aunt?"

"I saw her."

She closed her eyes and with a pleading movement freed herself from his arms. He followed her to the davenport, and, sitting next her, covered her clasped hands. She said with a smile that pierced him to the heart: "You know about me, David—all of it?"

"I know about you, Helena—all."

"Oh, really? Why do you say these things to me, David? Can't you know I would not hear them?"

"You are hearing them. I've known almost from the beginning. It was when I learned all that I loved you most, Helena."

She looked at him, her deep, beautiful eyes full of sadness: "How can that be? How could you feel so, knowing all?"

"Because I see what others don't. It is because you were sweeter and gentler and more unthinking of yourself—"

Tears sprang into her eyes. "Oh, no—"

"Yes—and that's why all this happened."

She saw the warm intentness in his face and the features finely drawn, pale now with his excitement. "So I do not see this as another might, but only as a regretful thing in your life, and not so regretful either. Didn't you say yourself, Helena, that through it you had grown strong?"

She lowered her head, unable to bear longer the strain of her emotions. "Strong for myself, David. But I would not have grown strong for you in this way—"

If she could then have wiped clean the days! If she could have stood before him in her glad, untroubled beauty. In a pathetic way she said something of this. Then she asked him not to think of her, for it could never be.

He said: "It is you as you are before me now that I love, Helena. No other has ever loved that. The spirit you can give to me has never been another's. It grew out of all this and it is beautiful to me and unselfish and very dear. I want it—want it greatly—"

She moved from him with her hand half covering her face. Then she said quietly: "I think I am paid for all the pain I have ever known. I think I am. Do not mind that I am crying. I cannot help it. And I cannot tell you—I can never measure with words the greatness of you saying these things to me. But you must believe me, for it is true. Oh, yes, David, it is the very truth. I know it with an utter completeness. Love is not for me—"

"Helena!"

But she was standing now and facing him. Her eyes shone and the tears were gone. "The truth, David—you must believe it. You must go—please."

He would have taken her in his arms and argued. But she stood like a statue, her hands clasped, summoning the strength of her life to stand her now. And she would not yield.

She even said and smiled: "Now, I am to lose another friend, David? That is rather hard."

"You are not to lose a friend. Let me speak."

"No—please—" for she knew that in a few moments her strength would pass and she feared these eager, yearning hands of hers—oh—how they would reach out and seize this almost terrible gladness— "No—you go—you are excited—so much has happened—and I, too—"

He gave a soft laugh then and his eyes with their winning

intentness were warm on hers. "I think you love me, Helena—and you will say it perhaps to-morrow—"

She shook her head.

"You will—I do not mean to be denied."

She leaned against the door when he was gone, pressing her hands against her heart. No one would hear that odd, sobbing laugh—no one would see the tears now, nor the white anguish—

Then she stole down the hall and listened. Jonathan snored—how even and blessed ran the lives of those two—how gentle their murmured talk in the dark—sweet evening of a homely love—

In the sunroom the hyacinths breathed like a song. Spring again. The stars had a golden look. She watched them from the window.

Loved her—he loved her. And he was loved. She did not deny this to her thought. She had loved him all along. Oh, the fineness of him and the deep winning eyes. He was one who did high, glorious deeds—never a thought about it. Oh, to walk at his side down the long, striving years. If that could be—

He was not for her. No! She said it and closed her eyes. Thoughts sprang at her like forms in the dark. And the Past came up and laid its hand on hers. She shuddered.

The Past claimed her. Bring that to him? Ah—drag the stain of her life across his that was so clean and strong. Things that were said came back to her. Oh, the things that would be said. How they would filter day after day into his office and through the hospital. Talking of her that was dear to him. How it would make him wince—and in the end how it would eat out his heart and his happiness. . . .

Was this what she should do to him? She drew back from herself in horror. Enough that he had spoken. That one as fine as he would dream of loving her. Let this beauty abide. Let her hold to it.

She wept. She sat there hours. When the silence of the night was most deep she prayed. Make her strong—give her the courage and the calm—

Then she wrote to David—she thanked him for all the wondrous kindness and that this was a holy thing that had come to her through him. She wished to keep it so. But he must know that she would not think of love or marriage. She couldn't—and please—let this be final—oh, do not ask again—

The next evening he said to her: "I got your letter—"

"Oh, please—"

"Answer only this—if you could think of love, would you think of me?"

A quick, fleeting smile went like a rapture to her eyes. He took that for an answer.

And every day he stopped her and said some winsome thing like that. He seemed happy.

But she maintained unflinchingly the stand she had taken. A sadness grew in all her thoughts. She felt as though these days were the last farewell to her youth.

She felt it most piercingly one afternoon on her day off. She went home. There was a visitor waiting in the living room . . . a tall, spare fellow who came out and took her hand with a half-shy: "Hello, Chickie."

It was Jimmy—back from the islands, tanned and with the teasing eyes sober, but the black hair heavy and unruly as ever. But Jimmy had an air about him.

He could not speak because of the tears for this was very sudden and she could not look at him, remembering that spring day years ago when he came to kneel at her side; to say: "Chickie—do you want me—want me now?"

But finally she laughed: "Darling Jimmy, home again—when did you come?"

"Last night—" He was ill at ease. Then he began to talk—good to be home. Jonathan looked the same—oh, he'd seen lots—had a fine time—staying a month or so—then: "Come on, Chickie—take a ride."

That was like the Jimmy of her school days. They ran down the steps together laughing. Martha Blake watched them from her window.

CHAPTER LXVII

THE DINNER INVITE

JIMMY helped her into the machine. He did it with a fine grace. She remembered how he used to hold her arm so hard, keeping her back when they walked along Mission Street. She said: "Jimmy, since when so very gallant?"

"Always!" He grinned. This broke a hard tension between them. "You're prettier than ever, Chickie."

"Ah, no, Jimmy darling—getting old—I'm past twenty-five now."

"And I'm thirty-one. Darn queer, isn't it, the way the years creep up? Doesn't seem so long since you first put up your hair. I remember the day. You thought you were the world with a fence around it—"

She said uneasily: "Oh, you dear old reminiscence! You always could pull out the memories."

Jimmy colored and began in a great hurry to tell her of the islands and interesting people he met and the summer's life every one led down there.

He broke off from this to say abruptly: "I heard of Munson's death. A pity, wasn't it? He had some pretty straight ways, didn't he?"

"You don't know all of them, Jimmy. Jake did so many princely things for me."

"I know. Mary's kept me posted on about everything. Yet I've wondered. Living alone, a fellow does a lot of wondering." He drove swiftly. They were in the park now—the leaves of all the trees had a tender, shiny look. Now and then beds of flowers flashed out jaunty and young.

"Chickie—do you like the work you're doing? Is the going hard?"

"Oh, sometimes, of course."

"Mary says you don't go out much. Wonder if you get lonely."

She guessed what Jimmy's thoughts might be, and gave a

soft, wistful laugh. Then he looked quietly at her and the fine, honest eyes demanded truth. "Remember that last day, Chickie? And things I said to you, and if you should ever want or need me—well, have you?"

"Oh!" For moments she couldn't speak, for it seemed to her a noble yet a pathetic thing that Jimmy should come now to redeem this promise. For in his young boy's heart the Chickie that he loved was gone, and he surely knew it. He loved the white, flaming beauty of her girlhood. He had watched its radiant blooming. That was the thing he loved, the thing he wanted. Yet now, though it was gone, his loyalty stood by.

Her eyes brimmed, meeting his. "Same old love of a Jimmy, aren't you? You'll take me if I need you? How darling you are! But I don't need you, Jimmy, dear, and you don't want me. In your true heart you know this. You loved what I no longer am—"

"That's not it, Chickie. I hate to think of you going along alone. Couldn't I make you happy?"

"No, you couldn't, Jimmy. And I would bring you nothing but a long, aching regret. You would have in your thoughts always the thing I used to be. In the sweetest hours you would know yourself robbed. Your thought would blame me."

"You were never to blame, Chickie. The man is always to blame in a case like this. I think the fellow who could look at you and want to hurt you is a—"

She interrupted: "Ah, no, Jimmy. He was no more to blame than I. I don't hold it against him now— Indeed I don't, but you can't think of that time without pain, without anger, without feeling that I was frightfully hurt—"

"Could any one, Chickie? Could any one?"

There came into her vision an intent face with winning eyes and a voice that said, "As you are now, I want you—dear and beautiful—" A faint glow tinged her cheeks. She watched the ocean. The waters were dazzling under the brilliant sun and the waves went dashing high about the rocks, flinging out a bright, impetuous spray.

"Oh—does that make your eyes burn, Jimmy? You see—it would always be a torture to you. Yet I think it glorious that you should come and make the offer, you dear old darling. Don't you know, Jimmy, there's a golden Eliza waiting for you? Why don't you look for her? As for me—I need my

lovely brother more than anything else you could be to me—ever."

"Who is Eliza?"

"I'll give you the book to read. I wish you'd find her. There are so few Jimmys in the world and so few men who keep any dream of love. Life ought to bring it gloriously to you. I wish it would. I'd like to know I didn't spoil the sweetness for you."

She wanted to see Jimmy's face, for the profile had a grim, pathetic look. He turned his eyes to her. She thought them sad—she thought them full of sorrow. He said: "You didn't spoil things for me, Chickie. I guess I knew you never cared as I did. But I would be glad if you needed me, because I loved you so—"

Long after Jimmy left that evening she pondered his look and his tone. She said to herself: "Every one who ever loved me is made to suffer—every one—"

She thought of him who was tall, whose face had such a vital strength—yet whose laughter was a sparkling thing. And he, too, must suffer because of her.

The day of her graduation came. She was nervous, yet almost beside herself with a hidden joy. Jonathan was so proud, with a tiny pink rose in his coat, and Jennie in white gloves and a patent leather purse, her face all beaming.

Jonathan walked down the hall with Chickie afterwards, and carried her diploma as though he were the only man on earth who ever had a daughter. He whispered in her ear: "Pretty as an angel, Chickie girl, that's what you are!"

Oh—that old fellow talking so, not caring who might hear. He could always put such warm fingers on Chickie's heart.

David came to the exercises. He stood in the back of the hall. She caught his eyes once. He gave her a winking nod. Then he came up with his hand out. "Put it here, little nurse."

Without looking at him she murmured: "I may thank you for this, David—"

"Might you love me for it?"

Her lips trembled. There came tears to her lashes. So he laughed and bent his head down. "Thank you, sweet lady. I see that you do."

He made light of all her denials. He insisted that she take rides with him. And to-night she must, because he wished to be appropriately thanked.

When she persisted in her refusal he said: "You offered to keep me still as a friend."

"But I've lost that—I knew that I had—"

"Come, and I'll be the coolest kind of a friend—please, Helena."

She went. They drove to a hill where there were many trees, and the moon hung down between the branches like a gigantic yellow diamond. David put a little box in her hand: "A token of friendship, and congratulations, my dear little girl."

It was the first gift he had ever brought. It made her tremulous and ready to cry. She couldn't find the knot in the cord because her fingers fumbled. He snapped it with a penknife. And there was a wrist watch, chaste, yet most exquisite in platinum and diamonds.

She looked at it and wanted to laugh, because it was so delightful.

"I see you like it?"

"But why—oh, David—I couldn't—such a costly thing as this—"

"Oh, hush with this and that—" He put it on her; he held her hand up and looked at it. Then he said: "Sweet hands!" and, bending quickly, kissed their palms.

When she grew silent he said: "I may do that! A courtly right that a friend can take! Helena—what do you plan to do now—you'll take a graduate course in surgery?"

"I thought of that, but now I'm not so sure . . ."

"It is the thing you must do. I've asked Mrs. Ellis to give you a place. I'll be needing you—"

She laughed: "Then why am I asked, since it is all decided?"

"A matter of courtesy—lady—things are all decided, but you'll be asked a few questions just by way of a little attention. . . . One thing, as a friend, I'd like to ask is this: Do you believe any one has ever a right to a second marriage?"

She answered astonished: "Well, of course! Why not?"

"Oh—I agree with you! Now that's answered. Helena, you wrote me a letter. It was very evasive. You can't, in justice, refuse me good reasons for the stand you are taking. I want to know why love and marriage are impossible for you."

"That is easy to answer. I know that a thing will follow me through life. It has so far. It will bring unhappiness. I'm

not going to allow any one else to be hurt by it. It is mine and I'm the one to bear it."

"You mean that people will talk? That won't bother me. I'll beat them to it. I'll say: 'Yes—what about it!' What's your next reason? Please—won't you talk, Helena. Surely I have a right to know."

"There might be others besides just two. I might marry and have a child. When this child was grown some one might tell it of its mother and this terrible thing in her life. You know how a young girl, for instance, would be hurt by that—how she might even turn from me—"

"No, she won't, Helena. I'll answer for the girl. Give her a problem, if you like; I'll give her ways to meet it. And our youngsters, please God, as Mrs. Toomey says, won't be such narrow little prigs. I'll train them better. I'll give them courage to stand the gaff of life. You see, sweet lady, you won't have all to say about them.

"Why, by the same token you might as well refuse to marry because our children might get the measles or because you might die and leave them motherless, or I might have my hands smashed—then they'd get no bread. You could pick out a thousand problems more grave than ours—don't pull your hands away—I said 'ours'—didn't you hear? When my mother died it was a bitter grief. I thought then no one had the right to have a child, knowing that it could suffer so. But that's foolish and weak."

"You were so young when your mother died—"

"Seventeen—almost ready for college. What made you think I was so young?"

"I thought your aunt raised you."

"Raised me! What in the world gave you that inspiration? Did she tell you that? Raised me! She stuck her face around for about a month and made things generally disagreeable—then I left for college—if that's raising me!

"What I mean to say is this, Helena—you can't remove the hazards from life, nor the pains. The best you can do is to fit a child to meet them. Can't you do that?"

She ran her hand up, trying to hide her face, for she could not hold the tears. He took her hand away. "You know that you can. And, Helena, why don't you think of me as well as of the children?"

He saw the little movements on the lips that were so sweet; he would have kissed them, but she shook her head.

"I am thinking of you, David. I see clearly, but your eyes are blinded with your feelings. This will not always be. Oh, you will come to see it coolly—"

And when he put his arms about her she held herself quiet and grave against him.

It was like this many times in the weeks that followed. He grew restless, then anxious. Perhaps he was mistaken—she didn't care for him—but he shoved this thought impetuously aside.

One afternoon his aunt's step-daughter, Dulcie Hartwick, the girl they had picked out as a proper mate for him, came to the office. Dulcie was giving a birthday party. Dear David must come. Such awfully interesting people would be there—even Marsha Newlands—

"And you know she loves you, David, almost as much as I do."

He was about to refuse when he caught a name from the stream of Dulcie's babbling.

"Lovely Mrs. Dunne? Who may that be?"

"You know her. She used to be Ila Moore."

"Oh—that fair girl! I've seen her lately."

"She married an awfully pleasant chap—Barry Dunne—a lawyer—"

"Will he be there?"

"Of course."

He became excited with a sudden desire to see this fellow—measure himself against him—give him the eye. He said abruptly: "I'll come."

CHAPTER LXVIII

VINDICATION

THE dinner was half over when the bomb was flung. David sat near the head of the table at Dulcie's right. He was inwardly burning with excitement and scarcely ate. Dulcie raised her glass to his lips and with her studied cuteness coaxed him, but he did not drink at all.

He watched a man who sat almost directly across from him—fellow with a beautifully sculptured head; mouth sensitive and grim—the man Helena had loved.

Then David noticed that Barry Dunne, after a first glance, kept his face averted. This added to his fevered unrest. It seemed almost that the man knew of his interest and feared it. The fellow had a suffering look in his eyes.

The conversation went fitfully. Glasses clinked. Some of the very young girls became flushed and laughed at the slightest comment. Gladys Ross twined her arm in her partner's. Her cheeks were brightly stained. She began to talk. The comments became more and more personal. Others added to them.

"Oh, Alice Payton getting a divorce! About time, isn't it?"

"And did you see Claire Royce at Del Monte? Some chauffeur she has now!"

Laura Manning's name came up. Was that patched up? Who had some new hop—?

"I—Laura has taken a job—can you feature it? Art department in the White House."

Suddenly from the opposite end of the table came this: "A hot one about Jake, wasn't it? Thirty thousand dollars! Wonder who the fair one is—some long lost child of Jake's perhaps?"

"Child!" Then a mocking laugh. "Why, it's Helena Bryce—"

"What! The girl mixed up in all that scandal that time—"

A buzzing—what scandal—oh, her— Why, yes—the very one!

David felt the blood pound to his temples. He saw a whiteness on the face of Barry Dunne—saw his mouth draw so that the teeth marks showed; saw him raise his glass quickly and drain it.

Far down the table he recognized Janina Knowles—her dark, striking face hard with anger. She had half risen and seemed about to speak when some one asked: "But really now, why do you suppose Jake did that?"

A soft, deep voice answered with a careless laugh: "Oh, I dare say Jake had his reasons for leaving half his fortune to Miss Bryce."

David looked along the line of faces into the placid eyes of Ila Moore, for it was she who had spoken. He said: "Yes, Mrs. Dunne, Jake had good reasons for leaving the money to Miss Bryce. I attended Jake when he died. I understand he left her the money to open a home for fatherless children. Miss Bryce is interested in some such scheme, I believe."

He had folded his arms and was now smiling and glancing quietly from one to another.

A streak of scarlet ran along Ila's neck. She said in a strained, high voice: "How very noble she has become!"

Some one laughed: "Well may she open a home for the fatherless! Her kind can fill it!"

The smile vanished from David's face. He looked at a vacuous blonde girl about twenty-six. This was Frederica Moll—a thin, elongated creature who leaned vampishly on the table and smoked. Her extremely low-cut gown gapped. It was she who laughed.

David said loudly: "Her kind, Miss Moll? What do you mean by that?"

Immediately a tenseness girded the table. Emily Burdell sat erect and white as a corpse. Frederica sighed: "Oh, tell him, some one! Perhaps he doesn't know the sweet, young thing has cause to be interested. She once had a child!"

David perceived that no one connected Barry Dunne with Helena—and that Dulcie, from the way she was tittering, didn't guess this relation.

He said, in a very calm, easy tone: "Yes—I know that, Miss Moll. What of it? Your mother had a child—my mother had a child—"

Attention drew to a white-hot point of anger. He caught

a look from Janina Knowles, like a shout of admiration. But other eyes were indignant and challenging.

A man said: "Rather liberal, aren't you, Doctor Ramm? There's rather a difference, isn't there, between the children born in marriage and out of it?"

"Ordinarily, yes. But in some cases I believe the only difference may be that the girl loves a man incapable of appreciating her love and the obligation his acceptance of it entails."

He did not look at Barry Dunne—but he could see the fine hands gripped about the glass. He spoke in an impersonal way as though the general aspect of the question interested him.

"The girl gives to the man in trust. Their relation is tantamount to a marriage. The girl may very well be of a fine and unusual type. The tragedy of her case is not that she gives but that the man fails."

"Is Miss Bryce such a case, Dr. Ramm? Here's to her, then!" Frederica raised her glass with an impudent laugh, and, leaning across the table, waited for David to raise his.

He seemed to grow suddenly tall and rigid. He reached over and took the glass from Frederica's hand, setting it coldly in the center of the table. "Yes, Miss Bryce is such a type!"

His eyes had lost their studied quiet—they were now blazing—some one gave a tittering laugh, asking in a high voice: "How do you know, Davy! Ah, there! Ah, there!"

"Miss Bryce is a nurse in the hospital. I know her very well. I've worked with her now for several years on all kinds of cases. I can assure you that every one who knows her speaks in the highest terms. When I need a nurse willing to sacrifice herself at all times—to forget that she needs to sleep or eat—I call on Helena Bryce."

Emily Burdell pushed her chair—then a glass clinked against a plate—a thin trickle of wine went redly over the white cloth. David saw that it came from the glass of Barry Dunne. He took his napkin and mopped it. Barry's eyes followed the motion of David's hand—there was no blood in his cheeks—

The man who had first opposed David was talking, but every one's glance was on David's face. The man said—"Very interesting—indeed—I suppose there are such cases—but isn't there always a weak strain in such a type?—it is easy to defend them, Dr. Ramm, but would you back up your faith? Do you

really think a girl who has had such an experience is as good as another?"

"I think she may be far better. For my part I would rate much higher the girl who has known one real love affair than those who go half way in a dozen shabby indulgences."

The man laughed: "Perhaps! But how many of us would marry her? Would you recommend the girl with such a past as wife—say, for your best friend?"

David glanced at his aunt, then back to the man: "I could wish my best friend, Mr. Miller, no greater good fortune than to marry such a girl as Helena Bryce!"

It came snapping like a shock—a sharp moment of silence followed. Barry Dunne folded his arms.

Bitingly across the table came a laugh: "How about wishing it on yourself, David? That would be the test!"

He glanced over quietly into Marsha Newland's eyes—then he looked at Barry Dunne and his voice flashed like a knife down through the room. Emily Burdell stood up: "Nor to myself, Marsha—I could wish no greater good fortune than to marry such a girl as Helena Bryce! Few men will ever marry as well!"

Emily, standing at the table tapped her hand—Ila Moore's eyes were hot, her cheeks crimson. Emily said: "You are very entertaining, David—and very amusing. . . . Well, I guess we have quite discussed Miss Bryce—and her noble scheme—we may leave her to you men—"

David rose. He bowed to his aunt. He said: "Emily—thank you!"

CHAPTER LXIX

THE STRONGER WAY

David bowed to his aunt, but his eyes and his thoughts were on the ashen, haggard face of the man across the table, the man who had taken Helena's love and now listened mutely with his head lowered and his eyes miserably glued to his plate while that pathetic love was desecrated.

Then Barry Dunne, with a reckless motion, ran his hand through the thick, red hair and pushed from the table. His eyes were dulled and burning. David noted the quick, furtive escape. A sudden revulsion for this scene and its stupid hypocrisy seized him.

The hot faces of the girls, their low-cut gowns, their hands twined in the hands of men; their whole sensuous make-up struck along his nerves in a passion of contempt and revolt.

Gladys Ross was now sitting on the chair with her partner, her cheek pressed on his; other girls remained in the room, crowding into groups, smoking, calling one another aside for a drink; telling highly colored stories. Young married girls exchanged husbands with a bright and laughing familiarity.

Frederica Moll, the thin, elongated girl who started the attack on Helena, was still leaning on the table. A man with an arm about her drank from her glass. He ran his palm across her shoulders.

Two other couples began to dance. In David's excited state the dipping and swaying of their figures seemed abominable. Phrases formed in his mind—names to call these girls—terms to crystallize their license.

His thoughts grew cynical. Squanderers! Playing safe and calling that doing right. Cheating the spirit, but saving the flesh. They spill the wine, much or little, but always holding to the flask, with this meaningless symbol inducing themselves and others to believe that the treasure remains. He said to himself "technically virtuous," and this was the least vicious of the words with which his mind now designated the promiscuous and almost unconscious familiarity.

He thought again of Miller's remark: "Do you really con-

sider a girl who has had such an experience as good as another?" He wanted to laugh loud and mockingly.

Dulcie ran her fingers under his cuff, pulling him to the edge of her chair. "You naughty, wicked David, aren't you going to talk to me? Why did you go and get mother all fussed up comparing that awful Miss Bryce to your own mother?"

He gave the girl a look of scorn that brought the blood leaping to her cheeks. He jerked his hand free. The vision of Chickie, shadowy and wistful, moving from him with that pathetic renunciation, "Love is not for me"; the vision of her, with the deep, beautiful eyes filled with sadness, refusing love because she was not worthy, passed like a flame before him. He pulled out his watch and rose hastily. "It's after eleven, Dulcie. I must be at the hospital in a quarter of an hour."

He went directly to the floor where Chickie was on duty. He heard her voice softly and he opened a door. It was the room of a woman suffering from a hopeless malady. Chickie was at the bed, bending down to dress the wound, an exquisite gentleness in her touch. She finished. Then she brought water and bathed the woman's face and spoke to her. He heard her say: "Don't be afraid, dear. No, there isn't anything to fear. I'm going to stay—"

Then she saw him and smiled. The look brought a gulp to his throat; her look would have given a beauty, so he thought, to the homeliest face. She followed him into the hall.

"Helena—you're finished now—come with me for a ride—only a few moments."

She saw the emotion in his face and that his eyes held an agony of pleading: "Oh—I would go. But she is dying and afraid. She has no one. And she doesn't want to pass in the night alone. I have to stay, David."

She seemed so white and slim, the smile on her face as she turned it to him a radiance. All this hurt him; all this made her seem impalpable as a spirit; infinitely cool and pure against the hot, shallow faces in his mind.

He was unnerved and turned his head: "To-morrow afternoon then. You will, Helena. It is the last time I'll ask the favor—"

She felt suddenly as though the world were fading and only he and the summons in his eyes remained. She answered: "To-morrow afternoon then—"

It was Saturday. She was to have lunch with Janina. When

they met, Janina's black eyes were brilliant with triumph. She took Chickie's arm and walked along with a jaunty step.

But she waited till they were at the lunch table. Just as she unfolded her napkin, she leaned over with a sparkling laugh: "Congratulations, ole dear! I got down on my knees last night and said 'Hallelujah' seventy times."

Seeing Chickie's blank astonishment, Janina's lip curled: "Why hide it, baby? He practically announced to the world last night that you were the only woman on the face of the earth and no one of us was fit to wipe your feet!"

Then Janina told. She repeated the conversations word for word. She omitted neither the red trickling of the wine from Barry's glass and David mopping it up, nor the alarmed heat in Ila's face and the tragic pallor of her husband's.

"I'd go through seven hells, ole thing, to win what you've got!"

Chickie's eyes were dry and brilliant; the thumping of her heart a thunder. She dared not trust herself to speak, so moving and incredible this was. That he should stand before them all and speak for her—

Janina said: "When?"

She shook her head. Janina was insistent. What was the idea? "You let one king go by, you little fool! Do you mean to ruin the life of another?"

"I would ruin it if I married him—"

Janina's shoulder raised in a fine, infinite scorn: "You would! So you're going to be kind and self-sacrificing, are you, and fling him to the likes of Dulcie Hartwick or Marsha Newlands? That will round out his days in sweetness! That will give the man a mate! Do you think a man of his caliber needs you to protect him? Give him credit for knowing what he wants—and what is good for him— The fellow who did what he did last night, Chickie, doesn't need you to think for him—"

Chickie scarcely listened. Her thoughts soared with a lilting abandon; her pulse beat with song; tears rushed about her throat in strange, melting tumults. Oh—what was this? All this!

She looked down two roads. Along one she walked in her quiet, grave aloneness, removed from the heat and fervor of living, the years fading in a chill routine of service.

And along the second were two—she and that other who was so strong, yet with the cleanness and the sparkle of the

waves or the happy morning about him. They would blend their lives, their thoughts. Oh, she would have a share in his work and he would aid with hers. The glow of it; the full and ripening beauty of years opening with ever higher deeds, ever nobler striving.

Sitting in her room that afternoon waiting for David's call, Chickie saw herself so and wept. Had she the right to it?

She thought of that thing Martha Blake said: "You, yourself, Chickie, and not the world must rule your life. Mark out your way—walk bravely in your own thought, thereon taking no heed of hands that would push you aside nor of tongues that would beat you down. Only have you triumphed when you rise superior to this fear of other minds . . ."

She walked about the room, clasping her hands together, drawing back tears from her eyes.

It was late when David came. They rode, and did not talk. Now and then the winning glance met hers. Now and then his hand reached over. They stopped on a bypath along the boulevard to Twin Peaks.

David said: "Let us walk."

He took her hand. They climbed to the top of the hill. Sweeping with majestic, ethereal splendor were the ranges all misty blue from the Golden Gate to Diablo; and waters from the white spray of ocean to the green sheet of the Mission Bay. Cathedral spires were dim in a shimmering, translucent haze.

He murmured: "Beautiful, sweet lady!" Then the wind blew the hair and the color to her face. He smiled.

They went into the forest. Trees murmured about them; the leaves were tufted under their feet.

She saw him so tall with a light in his eyes. She did not look again for fear that she would laugh, or in fear that she would cry.

They came to a little opening and here the eucalyptus trees formed a circle. The light was dim because of the thousand leafy branches. There was no sound. It was a sanctuary.

David stopped and took her other hand. He raised these two hands and drew them to him. She felt again in this vast and rhythmic silence that the world was gone. Only they two and the love between them had a being.

His voice was deep and tremulous: "Helena, tell me if you love me. Look at me and speak."

The words flew from her: "Oh, David! Love you!" Then

she was frightened, pushed him a little and lowered her head.

"Then you must take me, Helena."

"Ah, no—I cannot. I cannot—do not ask me to do this weak thing."

"Helena, if there were no world but us, would it be right?"

She smiled. "But there is a world, David. We cannot hush or flout it—"

"We can and I have told it so!"

"Oh—I know of that!"

He laughed a little: "Then you must marry me, Helena, for I have told them all I love you. You would not have me shamed?"

"I would not be the one to hurt you."

"Then you must not put the world above me." He lowered his head a little so that he could see her eyes, and, holding them with his, he answered: "That is not the stronger, but the weaker, thing to do. You want to leave me alone because of things that will be said. Is this what you call brave? But it isn't, my sweet lady. I am asking you to do the stronger thing and to meet, with me, what any one may say. For you, Helena, I could make any fight. Won't you make this one for me?"

She gave a little cry, remembering Martha's word. She looked at his eyes as though they held all beauty, all truth, and their light were now poured upon her. Many tears were on her lashes.

"David, is it your heart that asks this—your real, true heart? Oh, are you very sure that I should take you—that you can want me so, knowing all?"

"It is my heart, and more, that wants you, lady dear. I have told you why, for you are dear to me, Helena, and your thought is very pure."

She reached up then and touched his face. The branches arching above them swayed and a wild canary tossed out a note of song. She said: "Oh, David, why has this come to me—to me?" Then she lowered her head against him and was crying.

He folded his arms about her. He bent his face down to hers and kissed the lips that were to him the chastest in the world and most sweet.

She did not resist him. So there came to her, though she did not ask it, though she did not think that it could ever be, the beauty she had always loved, the richness and the peace.

CHAPTER LXX

FULFILLMENT

Six of the glowing years were done—ten since a soft April evening and a young girl with a great sadness in her face started on her way alone.

Ten years since Chickie stood at a depot bidding good-by to the two old ones who loved her so, yet sent her into the waste she had made.

She thought her life was finished then and all its music stilled. She saw the empty years stretch out—the bleak and tragic things.

Now the years were come—her hands were filled with gifts. Once she cried because she was so branded, and now because so many blessings should be hers.

Often seeing Jonathan come swaggering down the block, his young namesake astride the giant shoulders, she laughed aloud, so joyously the love had come to her. Other times going out to that house where the children she befriended played, she looked into the many little faces—tears rushed into her eyes because this service had been granted her.

She could turn back now to that other time and admit the richness of her life and its purpose grew from its tragedy. Because the flowers were fair she could forget the dark and bitter soil that nurtured them. She thought of her son, her teasing, brown-haired little Jonathan as her first born and David as the only love she had known.

She said to herself once: "It was he always that I loved." She meant by this that it was the beauty, the faith and the glory she asked of life and through him attained. She had always wanted this. Once it failed her—now it endured. And this was the living reality; the other a shadow that is lost.

In the beginning she was afraid. If David came home tired or not in a mood to talk, she watched him with a pang of terror. Had something happened to make him sad? Then he would look up from his book and tell of some gossip he'd heard, or give her papers to read. She would see that she had not

even been in his thoughts; he was not one to harbor hurts or look for them. She grew ashamed of her sensitiveness; saw it for what it was—a morbid self-affection. Other things in life to love besides one's precious self! Other interests!

And in the beginning, too, she prayed the little children would all be sons like David and like the old fellow standing behind her chair to look down with such awe at the pretty angel in her lap. But when the girl came she forgot it was another son she asked.

Yet she took the girl more seriously. Hard business this to be a woman these tumultuous days. This dainty one must not grow strong through being weak. She would not have its spirit thrive in sorrow.

Chickie looked back on her own life and on her own mother. How secret she had kept her thoughts. How little of them Jennie, living in her days of lavender and a kiss once a year under the mistletoe, ever guessed. How little she had ever dreamed of wild songs humming in Chickie's heart.

But she would know this golden morsel's dreams. She would be like Martha Blake and live in days that are; not in those that were. She would give this girl a hundred interests and a great deal, but most of all a sturdy sense of her own value.

She tried to find some rule that would guarantee a life of untroubled beauty. While the poor little thing was but two or three months old she became greatly agitated about it and confronted David every night with her theories.

He laughed at her. "I'll tell you, lady. We'll put a lump of sugar in her pocket. That'll make her sweet. You want a rule to escape the wear and tear of life? The only solution for life is meeting it. My dear, darling girl, we'll do as Adam and Eve have done for centuries—lie awake many a night and tear out hair and hope that the road we set her on is the right road. That's the best we can do. Stand by and cheer if the going is good; stand by and help if it's hard. Shush now—she's safe, I daresay, and won't ask for a cigarette till the age of two or a diamond necklace until five."

He had a ruggeder, happier way to look at things. He could always make her laugh. Men are that way—Jonathan, too. He was with them now, for the little cottage on Fair Oaks was sold and the wondrous garden with its spring song of roses and tulips had lost the gentle soul who cherished it.

Jennie was gone. She went so quietly—just sitting in her chair one evening darning his sock, then looking up to smile. A startled look darting through the pretty, faded eyes—that was all—and left the old fellow alone except for her, his bright and pretty one.

Sometimes in the evening when David was busy Jonathan would put out his hands as he had so many years ago when he wanted to keep Chickie at home. Then she would get the manicure set, even a little bowl of suds and trim and shine the tough old nails, curl up the long, straggly mustache. She rejoiced doing this. When she finished he always leaned down and whispered: "You're very happy, Chickie girl? Whom do you love the most—your old Dad or that new fellow?"

Jonathan with his stale old jokes! But they made her glad. For he knew she was happy. And he saw the deepening beauty of her face.

At night she stood at the window of the living room, looking down through trees to the ocean. The dog sauntered in and pressed his noble, weary old head against her arm. Then the boy came stamping down the stairs—their son—even the bluster of him gave Chickie a thrill. He would press his small button of a nose against the window and, seeing David drive up, imitate his grandfather: "Dere he is, Chickie girl. Dere he comes!"

And he would fly out the door to be swung to his father's shoulder. Wildie followed with a quiet dignity. He didn't like all these intruders at first—all these new favorites his pretty lady gathered about her. Now he viewed them with the tolerance of his mellow age and licked David's hand. This scene gave Chickie a shock of joy. And it didn't matter that it was repeated almost every night, nor that David swept off his hat in the same gallant way and put the little fellow down to kiss her.

He was happy—nor had the greatness of his work been hurt because she was his wife; nor the peace of his home stained.

There was no longer space in her heart for bitterness, nor need in her mind of fear. Her days were rich with much serving. One afternoon Janina told her that Ila Moore had gone to New York, taken Barry Dunne's child with her and left him here alone. They had only the one—a delicate boy of eight. The father wanted him. Janina said he was wild about the youngster, but the talk was that they had separated;

that she rushed away quietly, stealing their son for herself; that she had not even told him and now she meant to fight for the lad; keep him entirely. Chickie thought it a cold, shabby thing to do—a pitiful and warping culmination. She was sorry for him—deeply.

Janina said: "The placid lump of selfishness. I may be loose, but thank heaven I'm not vicious like some of the immorally good."

The years scarcely touched Janina and they didn't dull the rapier tongue. The nearest she ever came to admitting that in keeping her freedom she had lost her soul was one day when Chickie took her to visit the house of many children. There was a little black-haired fellow with rich, dark eyes and very red lips who won her favor. She got down on the floor and played with him. When she was leaving she said: "At the age of forty, and that, sweet satan, is but four years hence, I'm coming out to get one of your foundlings—save me a black-eyed little villiant like this."

Chickie hated giving these charges up. It was a stabbing grief each time one left. But she had to do it. For this was but a great old house with an immense garden and there wasn't money enough though David added $15,000 to the $30,000 Jake had given. Even so they couldn't keep the children always. And this had been her dream . . . oh, have a temple where every child would be God's blessed child and none would dare to put a brand upon them.

The best she could do was to keep them a year or two—give them the wealth of Martha Blake's dear arms. Martha came and ran the place. Her work at home was done. Tommy, though only twenty-three, was married—then Jimmy.

Mary went down to Honolulu on a visit. She wrote: "Chickie, do you remember Angela in 'The Octopus' and the strange idealist who believed she came to earth again for him? Well, there's a girl here all white and gold, like you when you were twenty. She thinks that Jimmy is the finest thing. I don't know if he thinks of love. I wish he would. She's awfully dear and would be just the wife for him." A year later Jimmy married the golden girl.

So Martha had no tasks for her rich and willing hands nor for the mellow soul. She offered herself to Chickie.

She said, "How proud you make me feel, Chickie."

Chickie answered, "Martha, do you ever dream how much

you did for me, and even taking David was half because of things you said?"

And Martha cradled in her wealthy arms many and many a one that no one wanted—cradled them and sang to them.

It was but half of a dream that Chickie had—less than that; only beating around the bush; only the prick of a pin against an iron wall. Girls were hunted just the same and little ones were branded. Sometimes a mother wanted her child most piercingly and didn't dare to take it, dreading the shame. That seemed so cruel—making out the child the wrong. Why couldn't the world be big and decent about it and say, "Well, since you're here, you little fellow—welcome!"

Yet Chickie could stand in that garden and bless the flowers, bless the sun dancing on leaves, and wonder why so much was granted her.

And in the afternoon David came to look at all the waifs and see that they were well and take her off. It was then she wondered most, for hers was yet a homing heart. And she never cared if he saw tears in her eyes—and she didn't care that he knew how much she loved him.

He was glad in her—their lives were mated. The love was given and the purpose. The life she thought all stilled opened now with rich, deep music in her heart—notes of giving, not notes of taking. They were sweet, and struck in chords of enduring beauty.

THE END

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